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GENERAL SIR JOHN COWANS, G.C.B.

The Quartermaster-General of the Great War.

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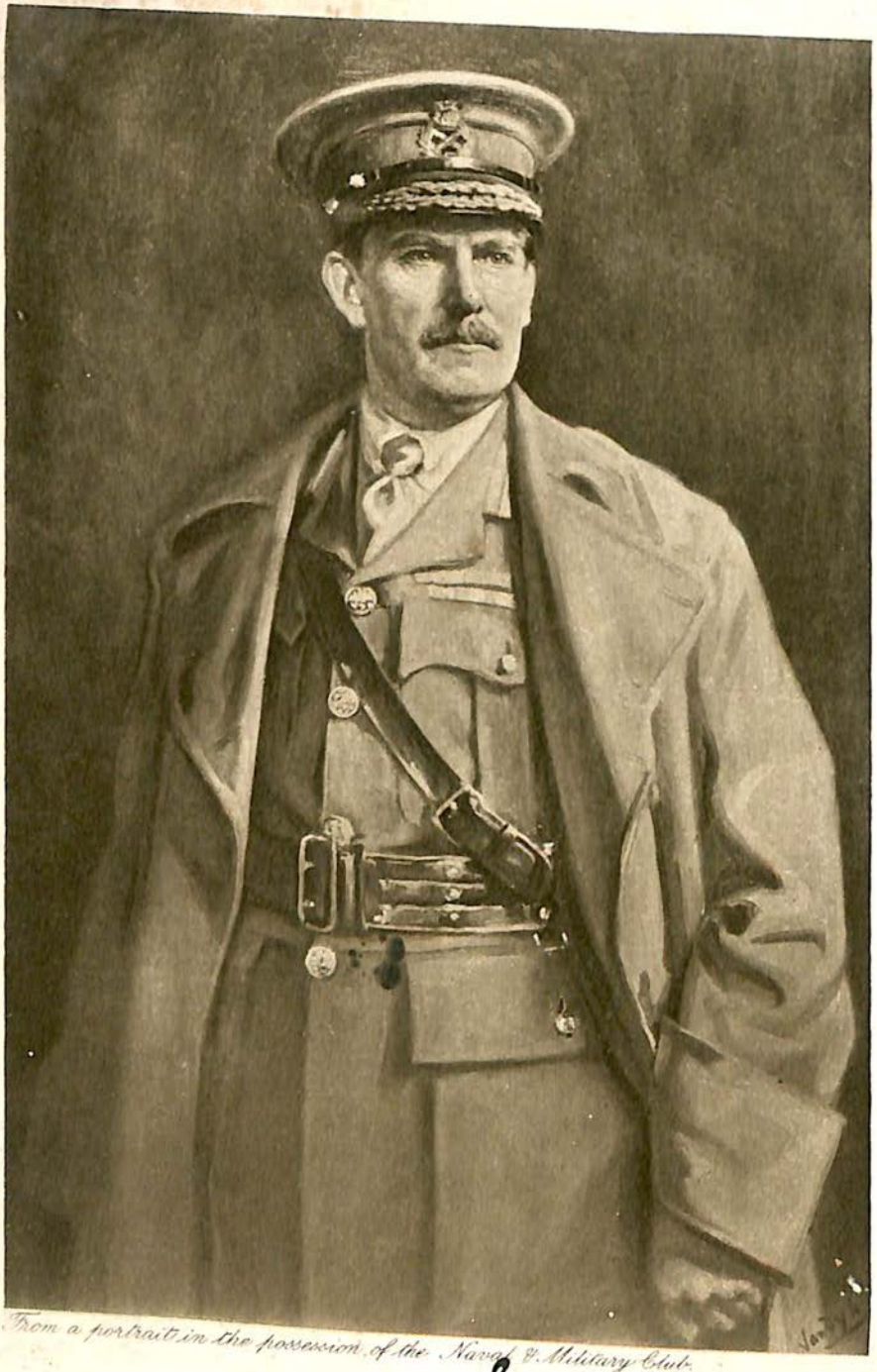

From a portrait in the possession of the Naval & Military Club.

J. Cowans.

General Sir John Cowans

G.C.B., G.C.M.G. :: The Quartermaster-General of the Great War ∴ By Major Desmond Chapman-Huston & Major Owen Rutter ∴ ∴

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THE British Expeditionary Force was at last in France; in fact the first fighting troops were actually in contact

with the enemy; the task which had been prepared for by years of devoted effort was perfectly accomplished. It would in ordinary circumstances have seemed an unexpectedly brilliant end to a successful Army career, and the soldier who, as Quartermaster-General, was largely responsible for the effort would ordinarily have felt justified in resting on his laurels. But with Cowans it turned out that this great effort was only a prelude, and he had unknowingly embarked on the most gigantic task of its kind and one for which there is no parallel in history.

On August 5 the first meeting of the British War Council took place; the next day Mr. Asquith, who had been Secretary of State for War from March 31, 1914, resigned, and Lord Kitchener succeeded him.

On August 7 the Germans were already in Liège, and the first units of the British Expeditionary Force stepped on to French soil.

Probably nothing could have been more fortunate for themselves and for the country at this great moment than that Kitchener and Cowans should have been closely and intimately associated in the prosecution of the War from its very beginning. They knew and understood each other, and their relationships were marked not only by mutual admiration, but by something not unlike mutual affection. Outwardly by popular report very dissimilar, they had much more in common than was suspected by the man in the street. General MacMunn (Major-General Sir George MacMunn, K.C.B.), for example, speaking of the time when one was Commander-in-Chief in India and the other a Divisional Commander, says:

"I have known Lord Kitchener, the austere, specially supervise the fitting of his house in Calcutta or of his car-de-luxe, to make them acceptable to the many ladies of beauty who would dine or drive with Jack Cowans."

These very human relationships and reactions had great value in times of stress and crisis. Then by universal agreement Cowans was one of the very few men in the War Office who not only was unafraid of Kitchener but

did not stand in the very least in awe of him. K. frightened some of the other members of the Army Council out of their lives—goodness only knows why, because he was the kindest and most understanding of men in many ways. Cowans knew his job; knew that he knew it, and was therefore prepared to stand up to anyone. Sir Sefton Brancker, who knew both men well, speaking of 1914-15, declares:

"The combination of Jack Cowans as Quartermaster-General with Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State was perfect. I saw a good deal of Lord Kitchener during the first year, as I was directly responsible to him for Military Aeronautics in all its branches. Kitchener absolutely trusted the Quartermaster-General, and quite rightly, for it was the one Department that really ran smoothly."

General Callwell (Major-General Sir Charles E. Callwell, K.C.B.), who during the first seventeen months of the War was Director of Military Operations at the War Office, says:

"In the early days of the World War I occasionally met Cowans in the passages of the War Office—my work had nothing to do with the Quartermaster-General's Department then. I remember one of the first days meeting him near Lord Kitchener's door. 'Do you know what he wants me to do now? He says I must get two hundred thousand greatcoats for this army of his before the end of the week. It's quite impossible,' said Cowans. 'What are you going to do about it?' I asked. 'Oh, I'm going to get them,' said he, 'but I haven't the faintest idea how.' And he did.

"He used to burn the candle at both ends, and I do not know how his health stood it. In those early days of the War I used to go back to the War Office after dinner, and was generally there between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. On several occasions when leaving I met him coming up the main staircase, having been dining out. He would then stop at his desk till all hours of the morning.

"I was acting as a Military Member of the Army Council at one time, and we used to meet almost daily to discuss various matters. At these meetings I was

always struck by Cowans's helpfulness and the soundness of his views when questions came up that did not especially concern his Department. If one went to see him he was never fussy, and was always ready to talk the matter over quietly—which was not the case with all the big men in the War Office, some of whom were apt to be decidedly snappy. Of course he never saw any active service ; I remember how delighted he was one time when he went over to General Headquarters and, when out joy-riding, got into a hot corner, and how he told us (most of us had had some experience of that sort of thing) all about it when he came back.

" He was a wonderful organiser, with a genius for getting things done and for getting the best out of his subordinates, whom he left to run their own shows as far as possible. His natural charm of manner no doubt helped him. He did not worry about trifles but devoted himself to the big questions, being equipped with a rare sense of proportion. Lord Kitchener had a tremendous opinion of him, and after a time leant on him more than he did upon anybody else in the War Office ! "

Sir Charles Harris found he was " altogether imperturbable," and adds, " I do not think I ever saw him really rattled, even in the spring of 1918. When Kitchener first came to the War Office in August, 1914, and began to give everybody impossible orders about everybody else's business, Cowans (who had the advantage of having served under him in India) said to me, ' That's his way ; we must give him what he wants if we possibly can, but don't take any notice if he gives wrong orders about the things he doesn't understand.' And on those lines we carried on."

An example may be quoted here to show that it was possible for Cowans to lose this customary imperturbability, which had earned him the nickname of " Buddha " when he was in India.

During the despatch of the Expeditionary Force a minor hitch occurred which, although it had no serious consequences, annoyed him very much at the time. On the outbreak of the War the First Battalion of the Devon-

shire Regiment was stationed at Jersey. On receipt of the mobilisation telegram the secret orders were opened and instructions were found to the effect that on a certain day a transport would arrive to convey the Battalion to an unnamed destination. On the day appointed it duly arrived, and the Battalion embarked.

The Master of the transport then asked the Commanding Officer for sailing orders, since, beyond instructions to proceed to Jersey, he had none. Neither the Commanding Officer of the Battalion nor the Lieutenant-Governor was in a position to give him any directions, however, for naturally no destination was mentioned in the secret orders. A telegram was forthwith despatched to the War Office asking for instructions. What became of the telegram will never be known, but apparently it did not reach its destination. Anyhow, it was never traced, and the Battalion stood by for an answer for several days, until the Master of the transport could wait no longer, and left.

Shortly afterwards a Battalion of Territorials arrived to take the place of the Regular Battalion, but still no instructions came for the Devons themselves. After about ten days, General Robb, the General Officer Commanding the Lines of Communication in France, enquired what had become of the Battalion, and Cowans then discovered that it was still at Jersey, and still awaiting an answer to the telegram. Arrangements were made for its speedy conveyance to France, but Cowans was compelled to call the attention of all concerned to the fact that important telegrams should be confirmed by letter, since, as he said, three letters could have gone backwards and forwards during the time the Battalion had been kept waiting.

§ 2

On August 23 the last of the first four Divisions reached, as we have seen, their War Stations in France, and two days previously the Government had issued orders raising the First New Army of six Divisions. Cowans, with the

country depleted of supplies for the British Expeditionary Force, had not only to continue to care for and supply the troops in France, but had immediately to start finding accommodation and supplies for the New Army.

It is quite certain that, apart from Kitchener and Cowans, very few of those in high places then realised, even in a remote degree, the probable magnitude and duration of the War. The Army from top to bottom was inured to thinking in thousands; the immediate necessity was to begin to think in tens of thousands, and many soldiers did not find it easy. Figures can be eloquent, and in this connection undoubtedly are. Three essential items of supply in an army may be taken as typical of all the rest. Up to the outbreak of War the Ordnance Services had been accustomed to provide annually for the Army a quarter of a million pairs of boots, some two hundred and twenty thousand shirts and well under a million pairs of socks. In the very near future it was going to be necessary to find something like these quantities in a week.

In the first year of the War Cowans provided fourteen million jackets instead of the normal two hundred and fifty thousand. The socks grew to fifty millions and the boots to ten millions!

§ 3

To appreciate the urgency of the first task before the Army Council—the finding of accommodation and training ground for an enormous number of recruits—it is necessary to say a few words about the pre-War conditions under which quarters were provided. Major-General Sir George Scott-Moncrieff, K.C.B., [1] writes:

"Prior to the War all matters connected with the allocation of troops to any quarters, new or old, were dealt with by a committee called the Peace Distribution Committee, on which every branch of the Army Council was represented, and the senior officer was President.

[1] Died 1924.

Sir Archibald Murray (General Sir Archibald Murray, G.C.M.G.) was President until, in 1913, he went to command the Second Division, and I then succeeded him. The most important considerations in selecting the site for new barracks or hutted camps were, in order of importance: suitability of the site for military training; healthy surroundings and healthy dwellings, ground, etc.; good engineering—suitable to needs, and economical; and facilities for bringing supplies and effecting movements.

"In the year or two preceding the War, a good deal had been done between the various branches to settle on some general outlines of what would be the best form of huts to be designed in emergency, and what would be the standards of accommodation, water, light, and so on. So when the War broke out, and I received orders (on August 12, 1914) to prepare a scheme for huts for a Battalion on war strength, which would serve as a type for all similar units, there was very little delay. I assembled the Peace Distribution Committee as usual, sent off a sub-committee to look for sites, and laid before the Army Council on August 17 a complete set of plans for a typical Battalion hutment. This was sanctioned, but one of my proposals was negatived at the Quartermaster-General's instance. This was as follows:

"I had proposed that only the accessory buildings (officers' and sergeants' messes, recreation hut, dining-rooms, cook-houses, etc.) should be built in the first instance, and that the officers and men should sleep in tents until all the rest was finished, and then the tents should be gradually replaced by huts. I proposed this because I thought we could not possibly house a hundred thousand men, with sleeping accommodation complete, before winter (only four months off), and I considered it would be far better for them to sleep under canvas and have a warm and dry recreation room to sit in, rather than run the risk of having neither huts nor recreation room ready.

"Sir John Cowans, however, considered that every effort should be made to complete the whole simultaneously. I think he wrote a minute to this effect, and my proposals were turned down.

"Meantime the sub-committee above alluded to had found an admirable site for a Divisional hutment (thirteen thousand men) in one place, and for a Brigade in another. We tackled at once the contract question, and on August 23 (when our Expeditionary Force first came into touch with the enemy) the huts for the New Army were begun on the sites selected. And, as a matter of fact, these hutments were finished early in November, 1914, a rate of progress which could not be kept up, for many reasons, afterwards.

"But, for some reason or other, this procedure did not please the Army Council. One day at the end of August, 1914, I was bidden to attend a Council Meeting, and found all the four military members there under the chairmanship of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Charles Douglas. He told me with some asperity that we were at war, and that peace procedure, including the Peace Distribution Committee, was now past, that in future all sites for hutments would be selected by the Quartermaster-General, and that I was to build where he wished. When I asked that I might have some opportunity, on engineering grounds, to co-operate in the selection, I was refused with, I think, gratuitous rudeness. I therefore bowed and left the room.

"Sir John Cowans followed me, and with charming friendliness, expressed his great regret at what had appeared evidently to him, as to me, a lack of courtesy on Douglas's part (poor man, he died a month or so later from overwork), and he said that he was getting a Director of Quarterings, General Heath (Major-General Sir Charles Ernest Heath, K.C.B.), who would have one or more Engineer officers associated with him, and would thus co-operate with me. Nothing could have been nicer than this. But it really never went further."

General Scott-Moncrieff later did invaluable work in building, in consultation with the Aviation Branch, two hundred odd aerodromes in various parts of the country.

We will now take a general view of the situation in the early days of the War, and fortunately we can do so in the Quartermaster-General's own words :

"The sudden increase of the Army in the autumn of 1914 threw a great strain upon the resources of the Quartering Directorate in accommodation, and the period of greatest difficulty was perhaps during the great influx of recruits in August and September. As the numbers steadily increased the strain continued with varying intensity, new conditions being constantly introduced by the arrival of large drafts of troops from the Colonies and from India, the formation of division after division, besides the countless new training formations, reserve brigades and units, and locally-raised troops, schools of instruction of every description, remount depots, command depots for officers as well as men, and convalescent hospitals.

"Added to this, there were the changes in location and formation due to the exigencies of Home Defence, movements of troops from one part of the area to another, or overseas to France, the Mediterranean and Ireland, all of which maintained the stress of the quartering, and required constantly increasing vigilance." [1]

Thus did Cowans begin his valuable report on the Supply Services during the War. No one ever accused him of being unduly imaginative, but as he wrote those restrained, officially-framed sentences after the War there must have risen before his mind the memories, still vivid, of those early days when, with men pouring in by tens of thousands every day, the burden of devising schemes for providing them with shelter fell primarily upon his shoulders. It was but one of the many responsibilities which were thrust upon him, yet it alone would have been enough to cause a smaller man to give way to despair; and not one of the troops, so newly soldiers and so lately civilians, during the discomforts of the first winter of the War, as they grumbled—for the most part good-humouredly—at the change in the conditions under which they had to live, ever gave a thought, it may be

[1] This quotation, together with those that follow, is taken from the Quartermaster-General's personal Report on the Supply Services, contained in the War Office publication, *The Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War.*

supposed, to the man who was scheming and overcoming almost insuperable obstacles, that they and their fellows might have a roof of some description over their heads.

The chief difficulty of all was the speed with which arrangements had to be made.

At the outbreak of hostilities there was barrack accommodation in the United Kingdom for no more than one hundred and seventy-five thousand men, and recruits came flooding in. By reducing the space allowed per man from six hundred to four hundred cubic feet, clearing the barracks of soldiers' wives and families, and utilising every additional building possible, room was made for eighty-seven thousand more, but this was little compared with the demand. To a certain extent the pressure was relieved by taking over schools and Government institutions, by hiring privately-owned buildings, and by placing large numbers of troops under canvas. As an example of the speed with which arrangements had to be made by Commands the following telegram, received from the War Office at Southern Command Headquarters on September 14, 1914, may be quoted:

"Two camps should be pitched, one near Codford and one near or at Sherington to-day for 12,000 at each place. Men arriving to-morrow."

It was a large order, but it was carried out, since there was fortunately no shortage of tents.

The bulk of the New Armies, however, had to be billeted at first in private houses, as many as eight hundred thousand being quartered in this way at one time. In fact, so bad was the weather at the end of 1914 that tents in many camps were full of water and the men could not occupy them. This was so with the Twenty-eighth Division, which was under canvas at Winchester, and when the order came for it to be placed in billets as quickly as possible, the Mayor and townspeople of Winchester rose to the occasion and showed much kindness and good fellowship to the troops. In a similar way the mud in the Wylye Valley, where the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Divisions were under canvas, became terrible, and both Divisions were placed in billets, the former in

Bournemouth and the latter being spread over Bristol, Oxford, Reading, Bath, and Marlborough.

This billeting alone gave Cowans endless trouble and anxiety, for the regulations had not been framed to meet such emergencies as now arose. New rules had to be drawn up, new orders issued, new rates fixed and then revised to meet the ever-changing circumstances, and provision had to be made to deal with complaints and claims for damages and loss which inevitably arose.

The best method of selecting billets had also to be considered, as well as the exemption of particular houses, and Cowans recorded that " the difficulty of obtaining suitable billets was accentuated as the War progressed and as the male members of families were removed, it being undesirable to quarter men in houses occupied only by the wives or wives and children of absent soldiers and sailors."

Cowans, as was his custom, decentralised as much as possible. In each of the Home Commands—which excluded Guernsey and Jersey—he established Area Quartering Committees. These committees were under Permanent Presidents and were subdivided into smaller groups, so that the billeting in every district could be controlled, and preparations readily made for quartering troops in any given area.

The Permanent Presidents of these committees were responsible for making the most economical arrangements possible, and since the billeting system, although it had the advantage of keeping the men dry and comfortable and was popular with the soldier, was a very expensive method of housing troops, they were directed to hire buildings for military accommodation whenever it was practicable to do so. By co-ordinating all demands, it was found possible to effect considerable saving of public money, since, with local committees operating, a fictitious value could not be set on accommodation.

The use of the compulsory powers for acquiring property conferred by the Defence of the Realm Act was decided on only as a last resource, sanction for the step being granted only after the Army Council had reviewed

the facts, since it was found that such property could usually be acquired under agreement on the loss basis. This was preferable in every way.

The Permanent Presidents, who had War Office valuers attached to them, were responsible for the assessment of rent and dilapidations of all buildings they acquired, for drawing up agreements, for reporting on the conditions of premises taken over and for inspecting them periodically while they were occupied by the troops.

"In this connection," wrote Cowans, "an immense amount of work was originated and carried through successfully."

There had been very little billeting in England since the seventeenth century, when it was very unpopular, but the civilian population accepted the situation wonderfully well. In fact, in most places billeting became popular, for the inhabitants, although at first anxious at having soldiers quartered on them, found that much money was brought into their town. It was estimated, for instance, that in towns the size of Bournemouth from £10,000 to £20,000 a week was spent by the troops during the winter of 1914-15.

The local clergy showed signs of nervousness in some places and feared for the morals of their flocks, but, although a few tried to make out that the billeting system caused immorality, the majority came to recognise that, on the whole, the men's behaviour was, all things considered, excellent, and they themselves always did their utmost for the comfort and amusement of the troops, giving up their halls, mission houses and other institutions and organising concerts and entertainments. It was generally found possible to obtain good training grounds in the neighbourhood of towns and villages, and the local authorities generally met the Staff in every possible way.

The usual charge paid per man was half a crown a night for food and lodging; this was generally accepted, though some people tried to get more and were supported in their demands by their Members of Parliament.

Central messes were provided for billeted troops when circumstances permitted, an arrangement which, besides being generally more satisfactory from the point of view of discipline and the welfare of the men, did away with the expense of the subsistence allowance.

§ 4

It was quite obvious that billeting on this extensive scale could only be regarded as a temporary measure, for, in addition to the expense and the danger of the available accommodation becoming exhausted as the armies grew, the area over which the billets were necessarily scattered rendered military administration very difficult, and combined training even more so.

It became essential that definite training centres should be decided on, and that arrangements should be made to meet the requirements of draft producing units and depots. It was considered inadvisable to keep the troops under canvas during the winter months, and this brought about the decision already referred to by General Scott-Moncrieff, to build small and large hutted camps in various parts of the country, sufficient to accommodate some eight hundred and fifty thousand men. This was, as Cowans suggested, "the largest scheme that had ever been attempted in the time in this or any other country."

It was a scheme which would have been a serious enough enterprise in peace time. In war time, and in the days, too, before our resources were fully organised, the obstacles at times became almost insuperable.

"The inherent difficulties of the undertaking," wrote Cowans, "were aggravated by bad weather in the fall of the years 1914 and 1915, while the shortage of labour and congestion of traffic on roads and railways did much to delay the completion of the huts."

The selection of suitable sites needed very careful consideration, for not only had the available space to be taken into account, but the questions of communication, sanitation, the disposal of sewage and water supply

also had to be gone into and often presented unexpected difficulties. Some parts of England suggested themselves naturally as training centres. Such was Salisbury Plain and the surrounding country.

With the actual siting of the camps the Quartermaster-General had, at first, little to do. The Commander-in-Chief of each Command was called upon to submit proposals for hutted camps, and these were approved or disapproved by Sir Charles Douglas, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He did not always see eye to eye with the local commanders. It was urged, for instance, by the Southern Command that the huts in the great Salisbury area should be built on the edge of the Plain, leaving the Plain itself open for manœuvres, musketry and general training, but Sir Charles ruled otherwise, and finally the huts were built on the Plain, mostly at Larkhill, at Sling Plantation, on Perham Down and at Parkhurst. Subsequently further camps were erected outside the Plain at Codford and Sutton Veny—in the Wylye Valley between Salisbury and Warminster—and at Wool, Wareham and Blandford in Dorset.

This area became the greatest hutted training centre in the country. The camp at Larkhill alone consisted of over two thousand five hundred huts and was designed for a population of forty thousand, and if this figure is compared with the population of the town of Salisbury—twenty-one thousand—some idea of the magnitude of the task may be obtained. In order to bring the materials to the area it was found necessary to construct a railway across the River Avon from Amesbury Station. The heavy rains of the winter months made the condition of the roads, which had not been constructed for heavy motor traffic, worse than it would otherwise have been. The mud became terrible, and the grass was cut up in all directions.

Brigadier-General S. A. E. Hickson, C.B., R.E., was responsible for the original plans for laying out the Larkhill area, the drainage, sanitary arrangements, water supply and the camp roads; and these plans were carried out on contracts given out by the Quartermaster-General.

The completion of the camp in the space of a few months and under the most severe climatic conditions was a remarkable achievement, and was typical of what was being done all over the country.

Besides the vast hutment area in the South, large camps were constructed at Kimmel Park in North Wales, at Oswestry and Prees Heath in Shropshire, in the Mersey Garrison; at Barrow, Cardiff, and Pembroke Dock; and Manchester City built a large camp at Heaton Park. Lord Derby (Colonel the Earl of Derby, K.G.) gave up a large area at Knowsley, and Lord Lonsdale (Colonel the Earl of Lonsdale, D.L.) was instrumental in the erection of huts at Gosforth Park.

Lord Kitchener, always in the closest conjunction with Cowans, gave his personal attention to the matter of building huts and spared no efforts to have the work pushed on as rapidly as possible. As an example of his methods may be recounted how, early in November, 1914, he sent for the Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Command (Lieutenant-General Pitcairn Campbell), and having asserted that he was not satisfied with the progress in building, added,

"Unless it improves, you go."

The General laughed and pointed out that the huts were being built under the contract given out by the Quartermaster-General; moreover, the weather was awful, the civilians would not come out in the wet, there were not enough tools, and mackintoshes were urgently required for the workmen.

"You must do what you can," replied Kitchener. "I give you a free hand to buy what is required."

He then gave General Campbell a list of ten senior officers of the Royal Engineers and told him to choose one to control matters. Major-General Sir Arthur Dorward, K.C.B., R.E., was selected, and later, by his efficiency and untiring energy, justified the choice.

Having settled this matter, Kitchener said:

"I must have that camping ground at Morn Hill[1]

[1] Near Winchester.

ready in eight days' time. Unless it *is* ready, you go."

The General tried to explain the lack of labour, transports and water-pipes.

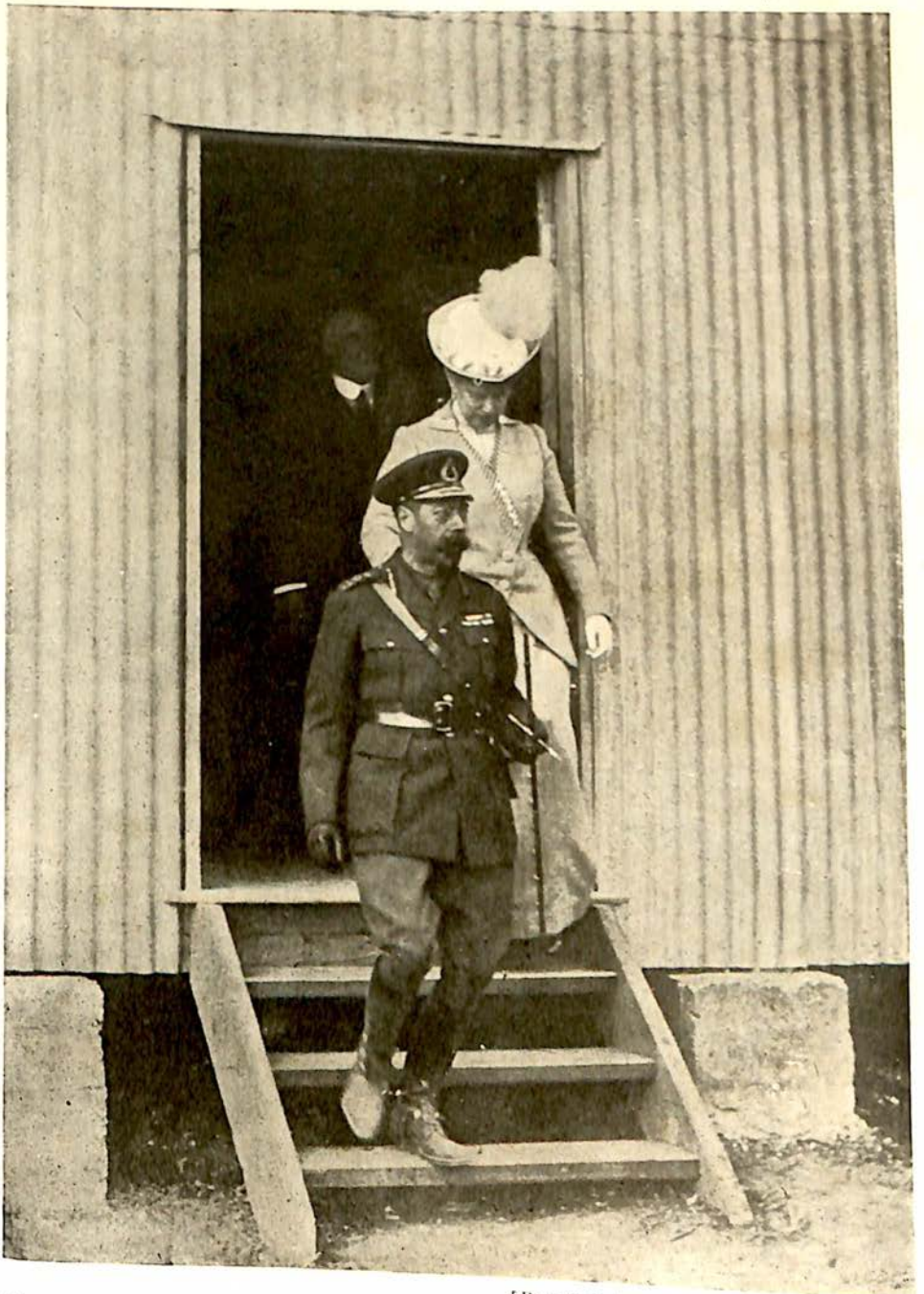
"I give you absolutely free hand to go to any labour exchange you like," declared the Secretary of State. "Get the workmen, and I will help you in every way possible from the War Office."

General Campbell went back to Salisbury, put the matter in the hands of General Altham (Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Altham, K.C.B.), who was General Officer in charge of Administration, and sent for the head agents of the contractors. The Morn Hill camp was finished within the time specified, and work with the others was pushed on at greater speed; the Canadians, who were under canvas on the Plain, helping with a thousand skilled workmen; mackintoshes and tools, thanks to Lord Kitchener, having been provided.

A camp laid down for a Brigade would contain the Brigade offices and quarters for the Brigade Officers and Staff; then there was a group of huts for each of the four battalions in the Brigade; these consisted of the officers' quarters and mess, the orderly room and guard-room, a large canteen for the men, and that most necessary institution, the Quartermaster's stores; a sergeants' mess, the men's huts, two usually being allotted to each platoon; stables for the transport; latrines, incinerators and baths. The last, which were excellently fitted with showers and hot and cold water, were much appreciated and did a great deal to keep the men fit.

These huts, besides adding immensely to the comfort of the men, proved to be of the utmost value in pushing on with the training in wet weather. As regards lighting, there were many proposals; it was, however, eventually decided to have nothing but electric light.

The average cost of each hut, including the institutes and all accessories, was about £400, and the hutment scheme worked out at about £20 per man, £50 per officer and £30 per horse, which was in excess of the original estimates.



[*By permission of General Pitcairn Campbell.*

Their Majesties King George V. and Queen Mary inspecting the first Nissen hut.

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The earlier huts were not built on the sectional principle that was adopted later, and this was found to be a great disadvantage when the time came for their disposal.

In the autumn of 1914 Their Majesties, during a visit of inspection to the troops on Salisbury Plain, were shown the first completed corrugated iron hut. Lord Kitchener, who accompanied them, was of opinion that it was much too good and considered that wattled sides with mud would suffice. General Pitcairn Campbell reminded him that it was essential to have buildings that would keep out the wet effectively. Kitchener, who did not usually appreciate disagreement with his views, had to admit that this was true.

"I haven't spent Christmas in England for forty years," he said. "Perhaps I've forgotten what the climate is really like."

The camp which was originally intended for the reception of the Australian and New Zealand contingent was also located on Salisbury Plain. Owing to the weather the building of the huts could not be pushed ahead as rapidly as was required, and the conditions generally on the Larkhill Ridge became so deplorable owing to the mud that General Pitcairn Campbell wrote privately to Lord Kitchener's secretary, Colonel Fitzgerald, and suggested that under the circumstances it would be much better for the Overseas troops to be stopped and trained in Egypt if the strategical situation permitted such a course.

Colonel Fitzgerald did not reply to this letter, but three days later the Southern Command received a telegram saying that the Australian and New Zealand troops would not come to Salisbury Plain, but would carry out their training in Egypt. On such slender threads hang the destinies of armies. Had it been possible to get the Larkhill huts ready in time there might have been no Anzacs available to win undying fame upon the barren slopes of Gallipoli, and, indeed, for want of troops near the spot, that ill-fated adventure might never have been undertaken.

§ 5

But we must retrace our steps. Two days after the formation of the First New Army was authorised, the Battle of Mons took place (August 23), and one of the most famous retreats in history started. It was a movement that only just missed ending in disaster. The last week of August was one of the utmost anxiety. Charleroi was fought; Namur captured; Le Cateau fought; Louvain sacked; British Marines landed at Ostend; the Germans occupied Lille; Arras was evacuated by the French; and on September 1 Lord Kitchener visited France to confer with the British Commander-in-Chief.

On September 5 the Retreat from Mons ended. On their way back the troops had lost everything they possessed. An eye-witness tells us how Cowans faced the situation. He never turned a hair or displayed the faintest sign of hurry or anxiety. It was at such moments that his nerve and self-control, his power of conserving his energy by deputing work stood him in such good stead. Where others wore out themselves and their subordinates with worry, he remained serene and purposeful.

But there was no standing still. On September 11 the Government authorised the Second New Army of six Divisions, and two days later the Third was authorised.

Hutting, of course, was only one difficulty, although it and feeding were perhaps the primary ones. After all, the men could manage for a time in what they called their "civies."

Salisbury Plain will continue to be taken as typical of the remainder of the country. It was our national training ground for the old Army, and few troops of the New Armies failed to find themselves there at some time in their career. Colonel C. R. Sylvester Bradley, R.A.M.C., one of the ablest administrators the Army has produced, writes of the autumn of 1914:

"In a short space of time the Quartermaster-General was faced with an additional burden of responsibility under which any but a superman would have succumbed.

The formation of another army in this country after the Expeditionary Force had left was a contingency nobody had foreseen, still less were we prepared for the enrolment of recruits by hundreds of thousands in the period of a few months.

"Regardless of the fact that officers and non-commissioned officers did not exist to administer new units when formed, regardless of the fact that no adequate reserves of uniforms and equipment were available, hordes of recruits wearing civilian clothing in every stage of repair and disrepair were banded together and placed under canvas. Day by day their numbers increased, all demanding food, clothing and shelter, when the normal supplies of these necessities had long been exhausted.

"The chaos and confusion of these early days and the nightmare of anxiety they must have caused the Quartermaster-General can be illustrated by a description of what actually took place on Salisbury Plain.

"Looking back after nearly ten years to these early days of the War, when the New Armies were in process of formation, one has a vision of confusion, rabbles, scarcity and sometimes wanton waste being transformed gradually but surely into law, economy and efficiency. One can visualise the unseen hand of the master-mind at work, piecing together what appeared to be a hopeless jig-saw puzzle with many of the parts missing.

"Some events, however, stand out clearer than others, and would appear to form stepping-stones, by means of which success and efficiency were eventually reached. One of the most serious problems in the early days was the scarcity of cooks; many units found themselves without a trained cook amongst their personnel. This shortage was met partially by the special enlistment of trained civilian cooks at a high rate of pay, to be followed later by the formation of Schools of Cookery in all Commands.

"Another problem was the supply of blankets and clothing. All the blankets in the country were quickly exhausted and an improvisation had to be made by

serving men out with lengths of cloth to take their place. (Frequently these dress lengths were sent home to wives and others, who converted them to what they considered a more useful purpose.)

"From the beginning of the War until 1915 no uniforms were available for recruits, nor was there sufficient khaki cloth in the country to make them; the temporary expedient adopted was to supply units with navy blue suits, but until these were forthcoming, recruits were compelled to wear their own clothing, which became little better than a bundle of rags.

"The available supply of shirts, boots and socks was not more than one per cent of the requirements, and it was a painful sight to see men walking about having worn their boots and socks through to their bare feet and with the tails of their shirts protruding through what should have been the seat of their trousers!

"The issue of soap and towels had to be cut down to one piece of soap and one towel per twelve men, whilst underclothing, razors and hair-brushes were unprocurable. The immediate distress was to some extent alleviated by the generosity of the local inhabitants who distributed large quantities of blankets, shirts, socks, etc.; but, even so, discomfort and privation existed to an extent that it is difficult for anyone who was not an eye-witness to realise. The saving factor in the situation was the fine weather and the indomitable spirit and patriotism of the men.

"One of the principal causes of the shortage of such articles as soap, razors and other necessaries was not so much the absence of supply in the country but the absence of the machinery for procuring and distributing such articles. At first, units had to be content with bell-tents and possibly one large marquee as a store tent; there were no tables or chairs; and the preparation of an indent, pay list, or even a nominal roll under such circumstances was difficult, to say the least of it.

"Conditions, however, gradually improved, and by the middle of November, 1914, most units had settled down to some sort of routine, and had been able to supply

their men with most of their personal requirements, with the exception of uniform. Parties of men wearing every combination possible with khaki uniform, official pattern blue suits and mufti were to be seen marching on the Plain in good military formation, but clothing difficulties had been to some extent overcome. Every man had clothing of a sort; and it was abundantly evident that it was only a matter of a short time before all would be supplied with a complete service equipment.

"Huts were being constructed under contract with all possible speed, but the weather, which so far had been ideal for the time of year, had broken at last, and many camps which a few weeks before had been covered with springy turf became veritable 'sloughs of despond.' Without tent bottoms, men were often flooded out of their tents, in spite of deep trenches dug all round them. Stories of men compelled to stand all night long as the water rushed through their tents, and of transport being bogged, were frequent.

"An attempt was made to get units to build their own huts, but the lack of skilled carpenters rendered such a procedure abortive; and as a final result large numbers of troops were placed in billets in spite of the detrimental effect such a procedure must of necessity have in the training and discipline of a newly-formed army."

§ 6

Besides being responsible for providing the soldier with food and shelter, the Quartermaster-General was, as Colonel Bradley has pointed out, also responsible for providing him with clothing—not merely with uniform, but with shirts, boots, socks and underclothes as well: in fact with everything he stood up in.

On the outbreak of war, Cowans's immediate care was the fitting out of the Expeditionary Force of six Divisions of infantry and one of cavalry. This task presented no great difficulties, but, once accomplished, it left him with little more than the material for replacements

for a few weeks, and meantime the recruits for the New Armies were pouring in by tens of thousands.

It was utterly impossible to find uniforms for these men at once. In peace time the army clothing requirements, as we have seen, had not been large, and the manufacture had been confined to a few firms. When War was declared, immediate expansion became necessary, but expansion on a large scale was only possible by gradual stages; and, moreover, before new firms could be set at work, it was first necessary to obtain materials in sufficient quantity. "Trivial as this item may appear," wrote Cowans, "it is an example of the difficulties obtaining that the trade was wholly unable to meet the sudden call for buttons."

It was a matter of vital importance that, by some means or other, adequate clothing, whether of uniform pattern or not, should be provided for the new troops. The desperate circumstances called for desperate measures. How far the War Office was forced to depart from its normal methods of procedure is well shown by the following quotation from the Quartermaster-General's Report:

"Mere expedients had, therefore, to be resorted to in order to clothe the men during the first rush of recruits. A supply of five hundred thousand suits of blue serge uniform was obtained, this material being the only colour procurable in sufficient quantities; and these uniforms were delivered at the rate of ten thousand suits a day. Greatcoats of blue and grey were obtained, and some four or five hundred thousand greatcoats of civilian patterns were purchased from ready-made stocks in the country. In addition, one million three hundred thousand jackets, the same number of trousers, and nine hundred thousand greatcoats were, in the early stages of the War, obtained from Canada and the United States.

"A contract was placed with members of leading clothing firms to organise smaller workers throughout the country, from whom a large output was obtained, but in this contract, until drab cloth became procurable, resort still had to be made to blue and grey material.

Quantities of the former were obtained from the Post Office from stocks which that department had in hand. As a further expedient it was also decided to give the sum of ten shillings to each recruit coming up with a greatcoat, boots and good suit of clothes, which he was required to wear after enlistment until uniform became available. Authority and express orders were given that all Officers Commanding should take steps to provide, by local purchase, boots, mess utensils and other necessities for the use of their units. This resulted in the purchase of supplies of whatever pattern or quality could be obtained."

It is not difficult to imagine that Cowans himself, although he does not say so, was primarily responsible for "authority and express orders" being given to Commanding Officers to make their own purchases. Nor is it difficult to imagine the horror with which the Finance Department at the War Office viewed the proposal that unit commanders should be allowed a free hand to spend public money without any restraining influences. Extravagance was feared, and perhaps rightly. Yet it was no time to count extravagance when the need was so great and the comfort of men hung in the balance.

It is not likely that Cowans got his way without a struggle, but he was insistent. At all costs the men had to be clothed, and as long as they were clothed he did not greatly care if a few regulations and traditions of the War Office were broken. He knew that, by decentralising, a wide net could be stretched, and that he would have every Commanding Officer helping him in his stupendous task. He found Lord Kitchener sympathetic as ever, and in the end he got his way.

It was well indeed for the New Armies that he did so. In each of the Home Commands the Staff enjoyed the unaccustomed luxury of being able to buy articles that were urgently required for the men, without any fear of the Finance Department quibbling over the items or disallowing any of the expenditure. Each Command became like a big business firm. Nothing was bought

that was not badly needed, and in the long run it is probable that, so far from Cowans's methods proving extravagant, an actual saving of money was effected. In this connection it will be interesting to quote a reminiscence of General Pitcairn Campbell:

"I remember a dealer in worn-out clothing coming to see me in my office, and we bought eleven thousand part-worn suits of uniform and seven thousand greatcoats from him. They were a godsend. We haggled over the price and whittled it down until it became a question of sixpence a garment, and, of course, the dealer beat the simple soldiers. I remember how my Military Secretary, a member of a large business firm in London, laughed and predicted that we should be beaten over the deal. However, we obtained the clothing and luckily much more from the same firm, and although the dealer may have made a very useful profit, it is probable that the Finance Department of the War Office would have paid far more than we did."

In those early days of the War it was an unforgettable sight to see the recruits on parade. Some were dressed in red serge jackets which had been worn by the Militia years before. The majority wore civilian clothes—some blue suits with white collars; some in corduroys with handkerchiefs round their necks; some had brown shoes, others hobnailed boots; there were "billycoke hats," straw hats, felt hats and caps. Seldom can the makings of any army have provided stranger contrasts—and seldom finer men.

§ 7

It has been shown that the provision of clothing necessary for the armies taxed the resources at Cowans's disposal heavily enough; but the provision of the necessary equipment taxed them even more heavily. The clothing problems were, after all, limited by the comparatively small number of specific articles that had to be supplied, even though they had to be supplied in enormous quantities; but the various items of equipment required were

over thirty thousand. These had to be found in equally large quantities, and naturally affected a far greater number of manufacturers, for they ranged from ground-sheets to water-bottles, from mess-tins to mosquito netting, from tooth-brushes to entrenching-tools.

Nor, in August, 1914, were there any large stocks on which Cowans could draw, and he described the position in the following words:

"The war reserves of general equipment, as of clothing, were small, being designed only to meet the upkeep of the Expeditionary Force for a few months. Consequently the mobilisation, within a few months of the despatch of the original Expeditionary Force of nineteen complete Regular and Territorial Divisions, together with individual units equivalent roughly to five Divisions, threw a great strain on our resources, then not fully developed. Practically the whole of the initial receipts of equipment, harness, etc., were utilised for these Divisions as they came in from the manufacturers, and to this extent the completion of the equipment of the New Armies was inevitably postponed."

This shortage of equipment was a very real hindrance to the training of the New Armies in the early days of the War. It is not difficult to understand, for instance, that a recruit will learn to slope arms better with a rifle than with a broomstick, and will become more speedily imbued with the soldierly spirit if he is fitted out in the accoutrements of a soldier. Squad drill is a monotonous business at the best of times, and Lord Kitchener at first insisted on the men drilling hard for seven days a week. It was pointed out that the men were being worked so hard that they were in danger of becoming stale, especially as there were few rifles to train them with, and he gave in, though with a bad grace.

He continued to back Cowans loyally, however, in the matter of giving local Commanding Officers a free hand to buy what they needed. It has been shown that a large quantity of clothing was obtained in this hitherto unorthodox manner, and minor articles of equipment were obtained in the same way. A Chief Ordnance Officer

was, for example, able to go to the nearest large town in the Command and buy up ten thousand knives and forks on his own account. Plates, drinking mugs and cooking utensils were also procured in this manner; and on at least one occasion the Mayor of Bradford was able to supply fifty thousand blankets to one Commander-in-Chief. In many places, too, the civilian population came forward with general gifts in response to an appeal for blankets for the troops.

Although it was found possible to meet the most pressing and more personal needs of the men by these expedients, it was only possible to supply the standard equipment of the soldier through the War Office contracts.

In 1908 the Web Equipment had been introduced; and this was the standard pattern for infantry at the outbreak of war. At the time, however, there were only two firms in England which possessed machinery capable of making this material, which was required for the pack, the haversack, the braces, belt and pouches, and the cover for the entrenching-tool. Previous to mobilisation the Quartermaster-General's annual requirements amounted to no more than ten thousand sets.

When the War came, however, Cowans was instrumental in arranging for a certain number of additional firms to learn the process of making the web equipment and to begin manufacture, but unfortunately they did not possess, nor could they obtain, the machinery for making certain important parts, such as the belt and the braces. Since the demand had to be met, at all costs, as quickly as possible, a modified form was devised so that the difficulties of manufacture might be overcome. In the new equipment the pack and haversack only were made of a form of webbing, leather taking the place of the remainder, and large orders for its manufacture were placed both in the United Kingdom and in America.

In fact so great was the demand, not merely for this standard equipment, but for everything that went to the fitting out of the soldier, and so inadequate the supply in Great Britain, that in the early years of the War the increasing orders in Canada and the United States neces-

sitated the despatch of Inspecting Officers and Technical viewers to those countries to examine the supplies, both in course of manufacture, and, as far as possible, on completion.

§ 8

The mobilisation of horses put to the test the impressment scheme, already referred to, the details of which had been approved personally by Cowans. It was a severe test, but the scheme, unlike many others which look well on paper, worked admirably in practice and with a smoothness which, it may be supposed, surprised nearly everyone but the Quartermaster-General himself.

Briefly, the task which Cowans had set himself was to mobilise all the horses required both for the Expeditionary Force and for the whole of the Territorial Force within ten days—riding horses, light and heavy draught, mules and pack animals—and, in addition, to provide a further supply whereby casualties might be replaced for three months.

To accomplish this he required one hundred and sixty-five thousand horses and mules. Now the peace establishment was twenty-five thousand and, by means of the system of subsidy and registration, a reserve equal to this number had been built up. It was easy enough to call upon this reserve as soon as it was required, but the difficulty lay in obtaining the remainder. The plans laid with such care and foresight by Cowans, however, worked well, and to him personally must be given the credit for their success just as he would have had to accept the blame had they failed. He had given himself ten days for the carrying out of his undertaking—and he succeeded in accomplishing it in twelve. It was a feat unparalleled in the history of military administration, and it increased the horse establishment of the British Army by seven hundred per cent.

Even this, however, was not enough. Naturally, no one had been able to foresee how vast an expansion the Army was to undergo and the increased demands for

horses that this expansion would entail, but the possibility of further supplies of animals being required at short notice in the event of an outbreak of hostilities had not been overlooked by Cowans, and it has been mentioned that his plans included arrangements for organising Purchasing Commissions, which were to operate not only in the United Kingdom, but also be despatched to Canada and the United States.

It was found necessary, however, to increase the personnel of these commissions considerably, but whilst the creation of the New Armies made it essential that no possible horse supply should be neglected, it was equally essential, when every available officer was required, that the trained soldier should not be removed from his sphere of military duty. It was then that the civilian purchasers, who had given their services to the country for the purpose of buying the horses for the Expeditionary and Territorial Forces, proved of even greater value than had been anticipated, and they continued working directly under the Deputy-Assistant-Director of Remounts in each Command, controlled by General Birkbeck (Major-General Sir William Birkbeck, K.C.B.), the Director of Remounts at the War Office.[1]

Each purchaser had a warrant from the Sheriff which gave him the power to acquire the horses compulsorily if the owners refused to sell at what was considered to be a reasonable price, horses being passed by a veterinary surgeon before being bought. The purchasing officer had, of course, made himself familiar with the arrangements in peace time, and was furnished with a list of stables in his district that contained horses noted in the last census as suitable for army purposes, fifty per cent of which he was allowed to take. He also had a list of depots which would receive the horses each day, and a copy of the railway programme which had been so carefully worked out in 1912.

[1] This distinguished officer became Director of Remounts in September, 1912; he and Cowans were the only senior officers who served at the War Office throughout the War.

In the early days of the War, horses were so urgently required that no limit was set on the price that might be paid, and occasionally several hundreds of pounds had to be given for high-class hunters, though usually it was rarely that £100 was exceeded, and then only for General Officers' chargers. Later, purchasers were limited to about £90 for chargers, riding horses, and gunners, but no limit was set for heavy draught horses, and these sometimes cost well over £100. Collecting stations in each district were arranged, and the horses, once bought, were sent off in special trains to the Remount Depots, thence to be shipped overseas.

§ 9

One of the outstanding features of the Administrative Services during the War was the expansion of the Army Service Corps,[1] which increased from its original establishment of four hundred and fifty officers and under ten thousand other ranks on the outbreak of war, to nearly eleven thousand five hundred officers and three hundred and fifteen thousand other ranks at the Armistice—the equivalent of sixteen Divisions, and more than double the original Expeditionary Force. These figures include the personnel of the Royal Army Service Corps of the Territorial Force, which was merged into the Regular Corps in September, 1916.

The Corps was divided into three main sections: Horse Transport, the chief home depots of which were at Aldershot and Woolwich; Mechanical Transport, whose main depot was at Bulford; and the Supply Section, with depots at Deptford, Avonmouth, Liverpool, Northampton, Manchester, Newhaven, Reading, Leeds, Glasgow and Southampton.

As the Army increased, the demands made upon all sections of the Corps increased proportionately, and

[1] The distinction of Royal was conferred on the Corps by the King in recognition of its splendid work during the War. (Army Order 362 of November, 1918.)

whereas on August 1, 1914, it was providing rations and forage for one hundred and eighty six thousand five hundred men and twenty-nine thousand animals, by the Armistice there were five and a half million men and not far short of a million animals that required feeding every day.

After the mobilisation of the Corps itself and of its Special Reserve, it was found that the number of officers available was inadequate, even when retired officers had been recalled to the Active List. Accordingly, a considerable number of direct temporary commissions were given to gentlemen whose experience in civil life fitted them for work in any of the three branches of the Corps, a scheme which, as Cowans has recorded, worked well in the early days when the material from which to select was readily forthcoming.

In 1912 the Divisional Transport had been re-organised by grouping horse supply wagons into Train Companies; each Division had its Supply Column of motor lorries, which brought rations up to a point where the Divisional Trains could refill and carry to an advanced dump within reach of the first line transport of the battalions.

Six Divisional Trains and Six Reserve Parks were required for the needs of the six Divisions on which mobilisation arrangements had been based. Fresh units were rapidly formed, and it was only thanks to the care and forethought which had been given to the horse problem by Cowans and those working under him in peace time that the expansion of this section of the Corps was possible, for the progress of the War required the formation of seventy-two Divisional Trains and twenty-three Reserve Parks, in addition to thirty-six Auxiliary Horse Transport Companies and twenty-eight Local Service Companies.

Even more remarkable were the results that attended the arrangements for the mobilisation of Mechanical Transport. Cowans thus describes how the needs of the Expeditionary Force were met:

"Only some eighty mechanical transport vehicles were actually owned by the War Department at the outbreak of hostilities, and in order to provide for the very large

number of vehicles which would be required on mobilisation, two subsidy schemes had been originated during peace, the first known as the Provisional Subsidy Scheme and the second as the Main Subsidy Scheme.

"The Main Subsidy Scheme had as its object the standardisation of a lorry for military purposes, the vehicles at the same time being suitable for civilian use. Designs were drawn up, and certain civilian manufacturers arranged to build and sell these vehicles as one of their ordinary types. This scheme naturally took some considerable time to produce anything like the numbers that would be required, so in order to fill the gap between the initiation of the scheme, the Provisional Scheme was introduced, which took the form of a register of all mechanical transport vehicles in the country. A small subsidy fee was paid to all owners of vehicles who agreed to allow their vehicles to be taken at the outbreak of war, and arrangements were made under the subsidy scheme for periodical inspections of these vehicles to be carried out.

"On the outbreak of hostilities, all subsidised vehicles were immediately called in and the balance, which was traceable by the subsidy scheme register, as impressed, the machinery and personnel of the subsidy scheme being employed for this purpose. The vehicles required for the Expeditionary Force were obtained within nine days of the outbreak of hostilities. . . .

"Previous to the outbreak of War, in connection with the subsidy scheme, a reserve of mechanical transport personnel had been formed, and wherever possible the driver of a subsidised vehicle was enrolled in this reserve, with the result that when the vehicle was called up on mobilisation the original driver came with it. This scheme worked very successfully, and sufficient personnel was forthcoming to meet the requirements of the Expeditionary Force."

The mobilisation of the Mechanical Transport Section was centralised by the establishment of a depot at Bulford, on Salisbury Plain, under Colonel Frederick Lindsay Lloyd, C.M.G. All vehicles, men and stores were collected there in the first place, and were then formed into

units and despatched to the various embarkation depots, the most important being Avonmouth, which was within convenient distance of Bulford and had excellent facilities for the embarkation of vehicles.

In this way, then, the mobilisation of the mechanical transport was completely successful, but of course no sooner had the Expeditionary Force been despatched than it became obvious that increasingly large demands would be made both for men and vehicles of all kinds for the New Armies. Steps were accordingly taken at once to control, and at the same time to increase, the output of the manufacturers. By restricting the manufacture to one or two definite types, something approaching standardisation was ensured, and in order to speed up production the country was divided into areas, in which resident inspectors kept close touch with the various makers.

Owing to these measures a weekly output of ninety suitable vehicles was obtained during the early days of the War. This met requirements for the time being, and a reception depot was established at Aldershot. The supply of skilled mechanics and drivers, however, soon ran short, and consequently training schools were established, the chief being three for artificers at Aldershot, Grove Park, and Birkenhead, and one for drivers at Osterley Park, Hounslow.

§ 10

While these unparalleled and manifold activities were going on in England, affairs elsewhere were a cause of much anxiety and preoccupation to the Quartermaster-General. On October 6, units of the Seventh Division hurriedly disembarked at Ostend and Zeebrugge to rush to the help of the Belgian Army, and some ten days later the Q.M.G. shared the general feeling of elation and imperial solidity caused by the announcement that the first units of the Australian Imperial Force had embarked for France. We have already seen that they were not to arrive there as soon as they and we had anticipated.

On October 19 the first Indian troops reached the

Flanders Front and thus began those complications regarding variety in Supplies which were to haunt the Q.M.G.'s Department throughout the War. On the 25th Sir Charles Douglas died suddenly, in all probability as the result of overstrain, and was succeeded as Chief of the Imperial General Staff by Lieutenant-General Sir John Wolfe Murray, K.C.B.

At the end of the month we passed through the critical days of the Battle of Ypres (1914) when the British line was broken and restored. But we were beset by difficulties at home as well as abroad. On November 14, Lord Roberts [1] died suddenly in France. During December a German airship was sighted off the East Coast; Scarborough and Hartlepool were bombarded by a German battle cruiser squadron; the first German air-raid over England took place; on Christmas Eve the first German bomb dropped on English soil at Dover, and the British Empire kept its Christmas in sadness and anxiety.

§ II

Having looked at the Q.M.G.'s task from the wider standpoint it will be of interest to see how his conduct at this period struck those who had opportunities of appraising it at close quarters. Major-General Sir Stanley von Donop, K.C.B., who was Master-General of the Ordnance and Fourth Military Member of the Army Council from 1913 to 1916, writes:

"My acquaintance with the late General Sir John Cowans practically dated from January, 1913, when I joined him as a colleague on the Army Council, and during the four subsequent years I saw him almost daily. From the first I was very much struck by the quiet manner and shrewd common sense which he displayed in dealing with his work as Quartermaster-General, and one realised how, from his long experience of that branch of the Army,

[1] Field-Marshal Frederick Sleigh, first Earl Roberts of Kandahar, V.C.

he was so fully qualified for his post. His conspicuous ability showed itself even more clearly when he was faced during the Great War with the enormous and unexpected demands due to the expansion of our Army, the establishment of which was, within twenty-four hours of Lord Kitchener's arrival at the War Office, increased five-fold, and subsequently ten-fold or even more.

"The Quartermaster-General's Department was so well organised that it competed with this sudden emergency, and it can be safely said that our armies in the field, distributed, be it remembered, and engaged at one time in seven campaigns in different theatres of war, were never fed or clothed better in any previous war. This was entirely due to the sound methods, initiative and foresight of all members of that important department presided over by Sir John Cowans, to whom and to whose memory the whole Empire owes a deep debt of gratitude for so ably looking after the welfare and comfort of those who fought and won the War.

"In all these strenuous times I never saw the Q.M.G. at all rattled, although often he had enough to make him, but throughout it all he calmly carried out his duties and was always cheery and ready to enjoy a laugh or a joke with one, although at the same time never forgetting the great responsibilities that lay upon us all. There is no doubt a great relief in having a sense of humour, and in his case it was abundantly proved; and from first to last I never had a more cheery or amusing brother officer to work with. The very last time I met him was just after he had recovered from a severe attack of appendicitis and he was explaining with a smile how he had been cured by being kept for a week on a diet of water and that the ailment yielded at once to a treatment to which his system was so unaccustomed."

Cowans the man never allowed himself to be buried by Cowans the Q.M.G. That was his abiding characteristic, his most notable asset.

The gift he had for picking men who would carry out his general policy without constant supervision and to whom he could give the freest hand, within certain definite

limits which he would lay down, besides his ability to let his officers alone while keeping check on and interest in what they were doing, now proved invaluable.

Then he had a most remarkable power of getting to the point and the essentials of a subject with very little exertion to himself. In fact he had a flair for the point of any question that he was dealing with. Speaking generally, he never did a moment's unnecessary work. On the other hand, he was perfectly competent and prepared to run any branch or all branches of the Q Staff work himself if it were essential that he should do so, but had no intention of doing other people's work unless need arose. Moreover, he also had a flair for the essential points and principles of good administrative organisation.

Another factor which naturally endeared him to his own particular Staffs and to those who served under him and ensured their best work was that, whenever he recognised a competent man and found good work being done, he was a most staunch personal friend and supporter of the individual officer.

These qualities gave him immense influence with those whom he was called upon to advise. They realised that he knew what he was talking about, and that he knew and understood his subordinates. He had also a great gift in always being able to accommodate himself when necessary to the special characteristics of those with whom he was working, whether they were his superiors or subordinates. In fact, his powers of fascination were as great over those he met in his official as in his unofficial life. This resulted in his bringing the whole of the Q.M.G. Services to a triumphant state of efficiency. He had the supreme power of " going large " in organisation matters which seems so rare.

One of the first things he did when the War broke out was, as has already been noted, to summon to his aid the ideal man to do the work he wished done. In 1914, General Heath became his Director of Quartering, a post he held till 1916, when he became Deputy Quartermaster-General. He says :

"Jack was rather an extraordinary man, one of the quickest workers I ever came across and one who could work all day and play all night. No amount of interruption by lady visitors and others during the worst part of the War seemed to rattle him; he remained always the same cheery, good-natured fellow. He was one of the kindest-hearted men I ever met and one who could never believe anyone would want to do him a harm."

We will end this account of the first strenuous months of the War with a few words from the pen of General Fry, who had helped Cowans when he was Director-General of the Territorial Force. He writes:

"Undoubtedly he was the man to meet the emergency. He had an extraordinarily quick grasp of any subject put before him and a very broad outlook on affairs. He was one of the few men who could at once free himself from all the red tape and rather deadening routine of peace work and jump at once into the enormous expansion of the supply services consequent on the outbreak of war. He was a quick and hard worker and absolutely self-reliant. His cheery and self-confident manner was a great asset in times of difficulty."

Those who knew and worked with Cowans attribute to him high qualities. But those qualities are justly attributed, and he was to have greater need of them still before the War was done.

CHAPTER II

1915

Sir William Robertson as Quartermaster-General in France—Feeding the armies Cowans's first consideration—Ransacks the world for meat—Generous scale of ration—British ration compared with that of other Armies—Cowans insists on training army cooks—Unified messing experiments—Quartermaster-General accused of overstocking—Sir Douglas Haig's replies—Sir Charles Harris and Lord Haldane on the subject—Origin of Expeditionary Force canteens—Quartermaster-General a pioneer of food economy—Creates special branch—Inspectorate of Quartermaster-General's services—Major Astor and the mutton bone—Sir Archibald Weigall describes obstacles and successes—The Battle for the red hat bands—River of bread at Salisbury—The King's anxiety regarding waste—Some critics answered—Remarkable results of economy efforts—Inferior administration in Royal Air Force—Buying coffins out of canteen funds—Preventing the soldier being robbed—Lady Londonderry advocates employment of women—Quartermaster-General's warm support—The Women's Legion—Its growth and development—Women motor drivers—Women's Army Auxiliary Corps established—Success of remount scheme—Cowans believes in the mule—Remount Depots—Two good stories—Veterinary Services—Cowans appreciates the R.S.P.C.A.—Animal wastage—Guns and ammunition—Kitchener on munitions—American assistance—General activities of Cowans—Uneasy about transport in France—Sir Percy Girouard's report shelved—Commanders in France dislike interference from home—Cowans and the Red Cross—Sir Arthur Stanley's view—The Princess Christian Red Cross train—General Alderson on Cowans—Princess Helena Victoria and the Y.M.C.A.—Sir Arthur Yapp—Events of the year—Gallipoli—Sir Douglas Haig succeeds Sir John French.

The belly listens to no precepts; it demands, it calls aloud. But it is not a troublesome creditor; a small amount satisfies it, provided you give it what you ought, not what you can.—SENECA.

THE autumn of 1914 having been crowded with dramatic events in the Western theatre of War and the Q.M.G. having had his hands more than full in finding shelter and some sort of clothing for the endless rush of recruits, the question of the stupendous feeding problem that was to arise had hardly been seriously tackled.

At the end of January, 1915, changes took place in the Staff in France which had a direct effect on the work of Cowans. Sir Archibald Murray resigned his post as Chief of the General Staff in France and was succeeded by Sir William Robertson (Field-Marshal Sir William Robert Robertson, Bt., G.C.B.); he was in turn succeeded, as Q.M.G. in the Field, by General Maxwell (Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald C. Maxwell, K.C.B.), who was destined to hold this important appointment for three years. Before, however, going on with the story of the year 1915, it is necessary to examine in some detail the supremely important matter of provisioning the armies because, in addition to the Expeditionary Force in France, two new armies were completing their training at home and we had military responsibilities and commitments in Egypt and the Dardanelles.

The food question will have to be reviewed as a whole, for to do so piecemeal would only be tedious. It will, therefore, be understood that in much of what follows, events in this connection have been anticipated in point of time.

It is quite possible to read many volumes about the War and not find one single reference from which you could infer that soldiers had a belly to fill, a back to cover, feet to be shod or a tired body that demanded some shelter in which to sleep.

"It was always realised that the feeding of the troops was the first consideration," wrote Cowans.

There are occasions when the unpassioned phrasing of an official report or military despatch may stir the heart of him who reads more deeply than any piece of fine writing or purple patch. This is one of them. Beneath that terse impersonal sentence of Cowans, quoted from the brief report he wrote on his five years' work as Q.M.G.,

Photo by] [Vandyk.

FIELD-MARSHAL SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON.

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lies the whole philosophy of the man, the whole secret of his success. It is not too much to say that had he not kept that "first consideration" ever before him, had he not subordinated all other considerations to that one outstanding aim, the feeding of the troops, the War could not have been brought to a successful issue by the armies in the field.

No war was ever won by ill-fed men. In normal times three things are necessary that the human being may exist in a temperate zone—shelter, warmth and food. In abnormal times, such as those experienced during the rigours of a campaign, man may forego shelter and warmth; he may rise above the needs to which he has become accustomed and fight gloriously; he may live in conditions of indescribable discomfort; he may suffer cold, fatigue, mental agony and bodily pain more intense than it seems possible that men could bear—and still endure and fight; but no matter how adaptable he may be—and the soldier is surely the most adaptable of living creatures—he cannot school himself to the lack of food. Wars have been won by tired soldiers, by ill-equipped soldiers, and even by soldiers who were ill-led; but no war has ever been won by soldiers who were hungry.

Cowans was the man who fed the soldier. He clothed him, too, and, in great measure, sheltered him; but since food was the soldier's foremost need, so had the providing of that food to be Cowans's foremost thought. Indeed, if one writes "he" instead of the first two words of the sentence in which he expounds his military doctrine, one gives him the most fitting epitaph that any Quartermaster-General could ever hope to have: "He always realised that the first consideration was the feeding of the troops." Early in his military career, as we have already learned, Cowans apprehended this great truth.

The Q.M.G.'s success or failure as a military administrator must ultimately be measured by the manner in which he fed the Army. That he succeeded, marvellously succeeded, in the face of difficulties which even to him must have seemed almost insurmountable at times, is beyond doubt. No army in any war of history was ever

fed better. There are millions alive to-day, from generals to private soldiers, who would acknowledge, gladly and cheerfully, that whatever else went wrong there was little fault to find with army rations, either in their quality, their quantity or the punctuality with which they arrived, not only in France, but in those other lands farther overseas, where the "side-shows" were being staged: and the greater the distance that every jar of ration jam and every pound of ration bacon had to travel before it was consumed, the greater was the Quartermaster-General's achievement. As Sir Douglas Haig wrote in his despatch of December 23, 1916, "The troops never wanted for food."

To a Commander-in-Chief is accorded the praise or blame for the success or failure of his men. Rightly so, for his is the dominating influence; he is the fountain head. In a similar way it is just that Cowans should be given the credit that the Army, during those bitter years of war, seldom went hungry, whatever else they may have done. His, too, was the dominating influence, for he was no figure-head but an untiring man of action. Without him all might have failed, and that his organisation was successful was naturally largely due to the care with which he, as we have seen, chose his subordinates, and to the free hand he gave them, once chosen. For all that, every member of the Supply Services must have his share in Cowans's achievement. The Quartermaster-General himself and the private who drove the lorry to the Ration Dump were the two ends of a chain made up of many links; and one broken link in the chain would have meant disaster.

§ 2

Before the War, as we know, no plans had been drawn up to provide supplies for anything more than the original Expeditionary Force. Arrangements had, however, been made for establishing supply depots at various centres in the United Kingdom and the selection of these centres was made with three needs in view—the troops stationed

abroad, the troops at home and the troops on active service overseas. Defence considerations were also borne in mind, and the fear of invasion had much to do with the choice of the depot centres. Nevertheless, the supreme necessities were ample and convenient transport facilities.

Immediately war was declared, Deptford Cattle Market was at once taken over for storage purposes in London, its great capacity and the ease with which immense quantities of supplies could be taken in and sent out without much handling making it ideal for the purpose. The rent paid to the City of London Corporation was said to be £10,000 a year, and it was well worth it. Eventually (in 1924) the War Office exercised its option to buy the Market for permanent storage purposes.

These plans had, of course, been made prior to 1914, and all that was necessary was to build on the solid foundations of an unequalled piece of Staff work, extending it to the utmost to meet a need immensely greater than any that could possibly have been foreseen.

Other depots were established according to plan, the requirements of the Expeditionary Force were met, and by September, 1914, the necessary reserves of supplies had been built up. In the staffing of these depots, Cowans showed that he was not hide-bound by any War Office red tape. He realised from the outset that if they were to be efficiently organised they must have men with business, rather than with military, experience to run them and to maintain their efficiency once they were organised.

"At first," he wrote, "regular officers were necessarily placed in command, but as the temporary officers gained experience it was found possible gradually to replace the regular officers by men of known business capacity. Each depot eventually had a business man at the head and junior officers with a thorough knowledge of railway work, shipping, labour, accounting, etc., so that the whole of the work was carried out, as far as possible, on business lines. As a further safeguard to the method under which our home depots were worked, the services of an officer with experience in some of the largest

London stores were utilised in an advisory capacity. He visited each depot in turn and advised the Director of Supplies and Transport at the War Office as to any possible improvement. At the reserve depot at Deptford, which was the most important of the home depots, it was necessary to retain a regular officer in command. There were, however, business men at the head of each department into which the depot was divided so that the commanding officer had expert advice always at his disposal."

Instead of decentralising, as he otherwise did whenever it was practicable to do so, Cowans, in order to avoid competition in purchase between Commands, arranged that all supplies should be provided by the Director of Contracts at the War Office.

"The supply organisation," he wrote, "was devised so as to be sufficiently elastic to meet altered circumstances and to admit of immediate expansion should such be necessary. A test of the efficiency of the system was provided almost at once, in that as soon as the depots in Northern France were evacuated it was possible by drawing upon home depots at Liverpool and Avonmouth to establish reserves at Nantes and St. Nazaire without any delay whatever. Again, at later periods, as expeditions in other theatres of war were undertaken, there was never the slightest check in allotting one or other of our home ports to maintain supply."

The chief articles of food which the Quartermaster-General had to find for the Army were meat, bread, bacon, cheese, tea, sugar and jam.

To facilitate collection, handling and storage, and to reduce expense, it was decided that the meat supply should be in the form of frozen meat.

The requirements of the Expeditionary Force were met, as Cowans had arranged, by the purchase as far as possible from stocks available in the country, the balance being made up by requisition. "To assist in the purchase and requisition two highly-qualified inspectors were engaged by the War Department." This arrangement was found practicable for the first few months of

the War, and Cowans always acted on the basis that "bully" was to be kept in reserve for emergencies and in case the supply of frozen meat should break down.

In order to establish adequate reserves of frozen meat, store-ships were at first stationed at Boulogne and Havre, and the supply was maintained by shipments from England. Later, the increased supplies and the loss of some of the refrigerating ships made it inadvisable to retain these ocean-going vessels as store-ships, but it was found possible to erect cold stores at the Base ports, though, as Cowans himself declared, "the uncertainty of sailing, in spite of the cold storage, made a guarantee of uninterrupted supply almost impossible."

Towards the end of 1914, so great had the demands become that Cowans thought it advisable, in order that no risks might be run, to approach the principal American firms, through the Board of Trade, which made contracts for regular supplies of meat from the Argentine at fixed prices, the meat being inspected on delivery. The Army was given what it required, and the balance became available for the civil population.

This system was found to work satisfactorily and, with certain modifications, remained in force until the end of the War, but, as the numbers to be fed in the field increased, it was found easier to ship meat direct from the Plate to the Base ports in France, where it was inspected. This saved the double handling and the extra tonnage and labour which would have been entailed by re-shipment.

As time went on, not only did the requirements of the troops in France grow enormously, but other Expeditionary Forces had to be met as well. The Plate supply was found to be insufficient. Cowans ransacked the world for meat—and got it. He got it from Canada and the United States; he got it from South Africa; he got it from Australia and New Zealand—where the whole output was made available for the Army; he got it from Brazil, and even from Patagonia.

No less far-reaching were the demands for preserved meat, which was obtained in vast quantities from Canada,

the United States, and Australia, the ordinary "bully" beef being supplemented by supplies of tinned meat and vegetables, such as pork and beans.

Cowans recognised that it was essential to maintain an adequate system of inspection if the quality of the preserved meat consignments was to be kept up to standard. The danger of bad tinned food cannot be overestimated but, once in its can, it is impossible to inspect, and accordingly, "to ensure the quality of preserved meat manufactured abroad, two expert food inspectors, loaned to the War Department by the Local Government Board, were permanently employed in North and South America; two inspectors were also sent to Australia to examine and report upon the conditions under which the canning industry was conducted there, while at home the whole of the Local Government Board inspecting staff was at the disposal of the War Department for inspection of all articles of supply throughout manufacture.

The mobilisation scheme had included provision for bakeries in the field, and these were established at each of the Base ports without delay. It was found, however, that the ovens originally in use, which were of the Aldershot pattern, could meet the increased output required of them only with difficulty, and early in 1915 they were augmented by steam bakeries, which not only lightened the work of the bakers, but also effected a considerable saving of fuel.

The other Expeditionary Forces had their own bakeries, and Cowans mentions the instance of the bakery at Helles, which was established on the Peninsula and maintained within some four miles of the Turks during the whole period of the occupation. At the time of the Armistice the amount of flour that was being shipped to the troops overseas was nearly thirty-six thousand tons a month.

In the early days of the War, Cowans found it more convenient, owing to lack of ovens and the shortage of qualified bakers, to obtain bread for the home forces under contract. Gradually, however, he managed to have Army bakeries established in various parts of the country, and

in time nearly all the troops in the United Kingdom were supplied in this way. This effected a great saving of public money, but later the installation of automatic machinery in some of the largest bakeries both in the United Kingdom and France effected an even greater saving, not only in money, but, even more important, in man-power.

Cowans experienced no difficulty in supplying the troops with cheese, which was a regular ration in the field from the beginning of the war, until the supply of Dutch cheese was cut off. Then it became necessary, as it had become necessary with meat, to arrange for the Board of Trade to take over the whole of the supply from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; in this way the Army's requirements were met first, and here again the balance was made available for civilian consumption.

With bacon, on the other hand, no such difficulties were encountered, and the supply was obtained through a firm of brokers. This was particularly fortunate, for bacon was one of the most popular rations among the men, and, as Cowans himself declared, "the excellent quality was consistently maintained."

The supply of sugar, however, was always a difficult matter and caused the Q.M.G. great anxiety, because its sustaining qualities, apart from the general demand for it among the troops, made it inadvisable to reduce the ration if it could possibly be avoided. In spite of the shortage, however, he found he could maintain the supply by reducing the quantity of jam.

For several months, too, great trouble was experienced in obtaining an adequate quantity of potatoes, the supply of which was arranged by the Forage Committee. Finally, however, arrangements were made to ensure the supply by ordering large quantities from Ireland, Jersey and Italy. In some theatres, such as Macedonia and Egypt, seed potatoes were sent out and enough potatoes to meet requirements were cultivated locally.

The burden of finding and maintaining these and other supplies fell mainly upon Cowans's shoulders. He was content that it should do so. But it is hardly possible

that a man more highly strung would not have broken down under the strain. He never spared himself. Swift in decision, swift in execution though he was, he worked early and late with many considerations to confront him, but with that one consideration foremost in his mind—that the soldier might have jam upon his bread, sugar in his tea and meat at dinner-time, and it was only by his constant scheming that, as time went on and the world had to draw in its belt, the scale of rations did not have to be seriously reduced.

§ 3

"Under the regulations for mobilisation," wrote Cowans, "a scale of rations had been fixed after elaborate experiment, and the scale finally arrived at was considered to be sufficient to keep the troops under active service conditions in a proper state of health."

In the first instance he had applied this scale to all troops, whether they were at home or on active service overseas.

It was a generous scale. For each man it included one and a half pounds of frozen meat or one pound of preserved meat in lieu; one and a quarter pounds of bread, or, failing a supply of bread, three quarters of a pound of biscuit; four ounces of jam; three ounces of cheese; four ounces of bacon; eight ounces of fresh vegetables or two ounces of dried; three ounces of sugar; one ounce of pickles issued three times a week; a tin of condensed milk for every sixteen men; salt, mustard and pepper, while butter, rice, oatmeal and potatoes were issued in the form of extras.

It was soon found necessary, however, to make some variation in the ration issue to the troops at home. Cowans therefore decided to introduce a daily cash allowance of fourpence halfpenny a man. This was to be spent under the direction of officers commanding units, and the ration scale was then modified. It was rightly considered that this would make for variety in the men's diet and for economy by encouraging the purchase

of locally-produced food, thus saving transport and handling. The allowance was subsequently increased to fivepence halfpenny and the ration scale further reduced, and in May, 1918, when Cowans was forced to bring the meat issue down to eight ounces, the cash allowance was raised to sixpence halfpenny.

Cowans recognised that this reduced scale of rations was not suitable for the young soldiers' battalions which were then being formed, and therefore in June, 1918, he introduced a special scale for soldiers under nineteen with a cash allowance of fivepence halfpenny; in February, 1919, when conditions became easier, he was able to give an all-round increase in the items of the ordinary ration.

The scale for the Expeditionary Force in France, as given, remained almost unchanged for some considerable time, the only material alterations being the reduction of preserved meat from one pound to three-quarters of a pound, and of jam from four ounces to three ounces; in January, 1917, the bread ration was reduced from one and a quarter pounds to one pound, the bacon ration from three ounces to two, and, with the consent of the medical authorities, the issue of cheese was also reduced from three ounces to two. Certain extras were issued as compensation for this reduction, and an occasional issue of rabbit was made.

"As the world shortage increased," wrote Cowans, "and provisions became more difficult, it became necessary to revise this scale, and in 1917, with the concurrence of the medical authorities, two scales were introduced, namely, one for the troops at the front and another, a smaller ration, for General Headquarters and troops on the Lines of Communications."

The new scale for the front-line troops came into force on July 1, 1917, and in consequence of a reduction in the bread ration "the medical authorities demanded an issue of two ounces of rice daily and two ounces of oatmeal three times a week. In due course of time it was ascertained, however, that the troops would not eat more than one ounce of rice a day, and the latter scale for rice and six ounces of oatmeal weekly was adopted."

Cowans, as we have seen, had always set his face against reducing the sugar ration of the fighting soldier, even in spite of the serious shortage of supply. The reduction of the jam issue from four ounces to three had effected a slight saving in sugar, but under the revised scale of 1917 the issue of sweetened condensed milk was taken into consideration with the sugar allowance, and when sweetened milk was issued the sugar ration was reduced from three ounces to two and a half.

A ration of butter, which had previously been issued only as an extra, was included in the scale at two ounces per man.

At the end of the War, therefore, the troops in the forward area were fighting on a ration reduced from the original scale as follows: fresh or frozen meat, four ounces; preserved meat, seven ounces; bread, four ounces; biscuits, two ounces; cheese, one ounce; tea, an eighth of an ounce; one ounce of jam; a quarter of an ounce of salt; and unappreciable quantities of pepper and mustard.

The condensed milk issue showed an increase.

There was, of course, in addition to this, a ration of rum for men in the fighting line and a tobacco ration for every soldier in France.

It is necessary to bear in mind that while the Quarter-master-General had in times of plenty to feed a hundred and twenty thousand men at home, he was at the Armistice, and at a time of world shortage, feeding nearly five and a half million at home and in all the theatres of the War.

He introduced his first scale for the Lines of Communication troops on April 17, 1917, but on July 1 the scale was amended.

By the introduction of this scale, without seriously reducing the rations of the troops in the front line, he was able to effect a daily saving on every man on the strength of the Lines of Communication of four ounces of meat, two ounces of bread, one ounce of bacon, an eighth of an ounce of tea, one ounce of sugar, and, on days when fresh or frozen meat and bread were not issued, two and a quarter ounces of preserved meat and one and a

quarter ounces of biscuits; and issued one ounce of margarine instead of two ounces of butter.

"These two scales," wrote Cowans, "remained in force until after the Armistice, when, owing to the altered conditions and the fact that troops on the Lines of Communication were performing duties as arduous as those above railhead, one universal scale was adopted. This scale was also made applicable to the troops following the Army of Occupation in Germany."

In all, three and a quarter million tons of food were shipped to France from the outbreak of hostilities until the Armistice.

In the other theatres of war the scale of rations was on a similar basis, being altered from time to time to suit facilities of supply and climatic conditions; during very hot weather, for example, cheese was discontinued as an issue to troops in Macedonia, Egypt and Palestine; while, as will be seen later, all troops were encouraged to grow their own vegetables.

§ 4

It is interesting to compare the British Field Ration with those of the American, French, Italian, and German Armies.

The American bread issue was one pound per man, the same as the British; while that of the remainder was over one and a half pounds—German troops receiving twenty six and two-fifths ounces and three-fifths of an ounce of of flour in addition. Our ration of meat and bacon, twenty ounces combined, was also adopted by the Americans; while that of the French was seventeen ounces, of the Italians twelve and a quarter, and of the Germans ten and a half. As against our half-pound of vegetables, the Americans issued twenty ounces of potatoes and two and two-fifths ounces of beans, the Italians five ounces, the Germans eighteen ounces, and the French none. The French alone gave their troops in the field a daily cash allowance of thirty-five centimes.

Neither French nor Italians issued jam, but the

Americans issued one and a third ounces (or prunes instead) together with a third of a gill of syrup, the Germans three, and two-thirds of an ounce—a larger ration than our own—but they could only give their troops one and a fifth ounces of sugar against our three ounces and the Americans three and an eighth; the French issue was one and two-third ounces, and the Italian only a third of an ounce.

The British troops alone received tea; all others were issued with coffee, the American ration being nearly double that of the other armies. Neither Americans nor French issued cheese, but while the Italian ration was almost equal to the British, the German exceeded it by one ounce.

No other foreign army except the American issued condensed milk, and its issue was only half that of the British. The Italians also received nearly three-quarters of a pound of *pasta*, or rice, and the French three and a half ounces; these two armies also had an issue of wine.

The food values of each of these ration scales, as based on the table of energies given in Appendix V., *Food Supply in the United Kingdom*, a report made by a Committee of the Royal Society in 1917, is worked out as follows: The American scale represented 4,714 calories; the French 4,466 (including 600 calories represented by the daily cash allowance of thirty-five centimes); the British represented 4,193 calories; the German, 4,038; and the Italian, 3,981 calories.

It is, however, difficult to estimate the nourishment derived from any ration scale unless it can be ascertained how much of that ration is consumed; and it is useless for a Quartermaster-General to issue the most sustaining items as supplies if the troops dislike them, or if they are not competently cooked.

The rations issued to the British Army were good, wholesome food. It was wonderful to see how recruits filled out under the influence of three meals a day and the open-air work. The agricultural labourer, who, in his home, had been accustomed to little meat, had never had such food in his life, and throve on it; others did their best to adapt themselves to their change of diet, but

undoubtedly in the early days the better-class recruits, of whom such large numbers were coming forward, found the food unpalatable, not because it was poor food, but because it was poorly, often abominably, cooked. However, those who had reasonable ground for complaint generally complained least, unlike the large body of very independent Welsh gentlemen just arrived from South Wales, who protested to an inspecting General that "the tea wass a little weak this morning."

At the outset there was undoubtedly wastage and inequality in the food. Commanding Officers of units and Commanders-in-Chief of Home Commands were often deluged with letters on the subject, some declaring the men were starved, others asserting that they were overfed and that beefsteaks, chops and saddles of mutton were thrown away or given to the pigs. One genial Commander-in-Chief had all these letters copied and sent the wails about starvation to the denouncers of overfeeding, and vice versa, with effective results.

When it is remembered that there were very few trained cooks available in those days and that everything had to be done by men with no experience of tent life and new to roughing it, it is surprising that the results were as satisfactory as they turned out to be. The Regimental Depots during the days of mobilisation did extraordinary work, feeding between three thousand and five thousand men a day, while, when recruits for the New Armies were coming in, the daily average for weeks at a time was three thousand. On November 19, 1914, when troops were assembling from abroad to form the Twenty-seventh Division, a good breakfast was provided for five thousand men at the depot at Winchester.

Cowans, as we have already seen, soon realised that it was essential that the best possible use should be made of the Army ration, not only from the point of view of economy, but from that of the welfare of the soldier. If a man's food is going to do him good, it is necessary for him to do more than swallow it—he must appreciate it; every soldier is a better soldier when he has dined, but he is a better soldier still if he has enjoyed his dinner.

As Colonel Bradley has already told us, Cowans established schools of cookery in each Command; men selected by units underwent a six weeks' course, and in this manner sixty-five thousand cooks were trained during the War. Schools were also established in the various theatres of war, twenty-five thousand men being trained in France alone, and a large number of men were also instructed at the London County Council's technical institutions and under local authorities in Scotland; while, as time went on, numbers of women cooks were trained and employed.

In 1917 it was found possible to make further economies in the messing of the troops by the introduction of a unified system of messing in the large camps. Captain E. C. Sowerby, agent to Lord Barnard in Shropshire, who was on the Q. Staff of the Western Command, was amongst the first to try this as an experiment at the Kimmel Park Camp; two or three highly-trained officers superintended the whole of the messing of the camp. Instead of each unit having separate account books, the accounts of the camp were amalgamated into one book with a ledger account for each unit. The universal diet of the camp, after discussion, was drawn up at the Headquarters of the Command, slight alterations being made to suit the tastes of particular units as necessary; food was prepared at and distributed from central kitchens; all cash being received and expended by the central officers.

The accommodation at Kimmel Park was for between eight and ten thousand troops, and by dealing with the messing on a large and centralised scale, very considerable economies were made, while the standard of messing was improved. The system, which at first met with some opposition from several officers of long service, was experimented with in various Commands so successfully that in 1917 and 1918 it was, by Cowans's direction, considerably extended.

The full measure of this continual improvement in the soldiers' messing may be seen in the figures the Q.M.G. himself gives of the decreasing number of complaints

received from all sources: in 1915 these amounted to three hundred and fifty-nine; in 1916 to one hundred and forty-four; in 1917 to one hundred and sixteen; and in 1918 to fifty-eight.

Fifty-eight complaints in a year to the man who was feeding five million!

Thus did Cowans fulfil the main obligations of his office—the feeding of the troops. No soldier ever had a task more onerous: no soldier ever accomplished it more successfully. It would not be too much to say that in the Home Commands the supplies never broke down; and on the rare occasions when they broke down overseas, it was not through the fault of the Supply Services, but rather by the force of abnormal conditions.

Perhaps the most serious breakdown was that which occurred in France during the final advance when, owing to the Army pushing swiftly beyond the limits where the supplies could reach them by road and railway, they were denied frequently, and for long periods, comforts which they had been accustomed to obtain even under battle conditions. Nothing beyond bare necessities could be got forward to them. Even these were at times short in some units, and on more than one occasion the only available supplies of food were the current day's issues carried on the man.[1]

In fact, the only thing that ever beat Cowans was the rapidity of the final advance to victory of the troops he had fed so long.

It has been said that Cowans overstocked. It is true that almost up to the end of the War he was buying vast quantities of stores. But the end, when it did come, came swiftly, and no other possible course lay open to him, while food was becoming scarcer every month, but to provide for future contingencies by maintaining large reserves. Had these reserves not been available it would have gone ill indeed with the troops during the black days of March, 1918, when huge quantities of supplies had to be abandoned during the retreat. Thanks to

[1] Sir Douglas Haig's Despatch, March 21, 1919.

Cowans's foresight, for every ton of food lost another ton was forthcoming, and as Sir Douglas Haig declared, "That there was never any lack of food or ammunition for the troops reflects the very highest credit on all concerned." Moreover, it was only thanks to Cowans's "overstocking" that it was possible during the final advance to distribute five million rations to the civil population of the liberated areas in France and Belgium.

Cowans's achievement in feeding the soldier cannot be over-estimated. To quote an expression often used of deeds of gallantry in the field—it was "beyond praise." That an army marches on its belly is an old military adage. It also fights on its belly. More, it wins on its belly. Without the organisation of supplies which Cowans built up during those four years from Whitehall, victory could hardly have been attained, and every pound that he spent, because it was spent to this end, was well spent. This was the view of Sir Douglas Haig himself when, in his final despatch, he paid the tribute to the Administrative Services that was left unpaid by the British Government:

"It is hardly too much to assert that, however seemingly extravagant in men and money, no system of supply except the most perfect should ever be contemplated. To give a single example, unless our supply services had been fully efficient, the great advance carried out by our Armies during the autumn of last year could not have been achieved.

"Wars may be won or lost by the standard of health and moral of the opposing forces. Moral depends to a very large extent upon the feeding and general well-being of the troops. Badly-supplied troops will invariably be low in moral, and an army ravaged by disease ceases to be a fighting force. The feeding and health of the fighting forces are dependent upon the rearward services, and so it may be argued that with the rearward services rests victory or defeat. In our case we can justly say that our supply system has been developed into one of the most perfect in the world." [1]

[1] Sir Douglas Haig's Despatch, March 21, 1919.

As for the charge of over-buying it is sufficient to quote Sir Charles Harris, who was in charge of the War Office Finances for some sixteen years and with whom Cowans had many tussles over expenditure. He says:

"Cowans was determined that the Army should run no risk of being short of anything he could provide, and in fact he over-provided on a large scale rather than run any such risk; but he disliked any spending of money without getting full value for it, in the immediate sense."

This opinion may fittingly be reinforced by that of Lord Kitchener. Sir George Arthur states:[1]

"Supplies to the armies in being and to be were a scarcely less weighty subject than the armies themselves, but the one relief from anxious care which Kitchener enjoyed was in the matter of food, clothing and comforts for the Field Forces. So shrewd was the providence and so fruitful were the efforts of Sir John Cowans, the Quarter-master-General, that as regards his department the Secretary of State had to apply no spur—scarcely to make a suggestion. 'Carry on and consult me if you are in difficulties,' he had but to say to his inestimably efficient subordinate."

It has been thought convenient and making for clearness to deal thus broadly with the whole of the feeding problem of the war in one place, and hereafter it will only be referred to in passing. We now come to a supplementary aspect of it that must be touched upon. Cowans realised that the ration, of itself, although more than sufficient to sustain health, required variation and augmentation; moreover, the troops wanted canteens in which to spend some of their money on little luxuries.

In January, 1915, with the cordial co-operation and encouragement of the Q.M.G., an organisation known as the Expeditionary Force Canteens was set up. Previous to the War, with the exception of a few run regimentally, all Army Canteens were sub-let to a contractor; one contractor, of course, often running dozens. Two of the largest of these, the Canteen and Mess Co-operative Society

[1] *Life of Lord Kitchener*, p. 263.

and Messrs Richard Dickinson and Company, Limited, were authorised to establish a Co-operative Society for the purpose of forming canteens overseas and running them without profit to either firm. After paying all expenses, any profits made were to be devoted to the general welfare of the soldier. Army Council Orders were issued and the whole matter put on an official basis. The Canteen staffs became, in fact, civilian subordinates of the Army Council and, as such, liable to inspection and control. Thus began the enormous organisation which eventually ended up with a profit of over ten million pounds.

A couple of months later the Board of Control of Regimental Institutes was set up to control the Home Canteens. It consisted of Mr. Edgar Horne, Sir Richard Burbidge, Bt., Mr. Lothian Nicholson, Sir William Lever, Bt. (the Viscount Leverhulme), General Long (Major-General Sidney Selden Long, C.B.), then Director of Supplies and Transport, who represented the War Office, with Sir Charles Nicholson [1] as chairman. Only meeting once a month, it was unable to do any actual supervision and confined itself to advisory work, more particularly in connection with purchasing of goods for canteens. It did much valuable work until superseded in July, 1916, by the Army Canteen Committee (The Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes). This organisation, like the Expeditionary Force Canteens, was not supposed to exploit the soldier. But very often it did, and it also made a profit amounting to some two millions.

As early as the autumn of 1915 Cowans had realised that special steps must be taken to check waste of food, improve feeding, supervise and improve hutting and billeting, encourage the provision of recreation faculties and, generally speaking, look after the physical and mental well-being of the soldier.

The Commands were all overcrowded with troops; the normal establishment of Staff Officers were all fully employed, indeed overworked. Regimental officers were

[1] Died 1918.

in many cases inexperienced, and even Territorial Battalions, whose training was quite fair, had very limited experience of administration. Cowans, with his quick grasp, saw exactly what was wanted. He did not require the ordinary Regimental or Staff Officer, but a special breed of his own. He proceeded to appoint a certain number of Inspectors of Administrative Services, as they were at first called. In order to be able to keep in close touch with them, he placed these officers on the Quartermaster-General's Staff and merely stationed them in the various Commands. Copies of their reports went direct to the Q.M.G., at the same time as to their Command Headquarters, and their privilege of going direct to the War Office, even without the consent of the Commander-in-Chief of the Command in which they were stationed, caused much jealousy; but, in spite of pressure from many directions, Cowans would never abolish it. At this juncture his knowledge of men, of human nature, and of the world, stood him in good stead.

He chose at the outset men who, for physical or other reasons, were unfitted for active service or who, having been wounded, were on light duty. They were all men of position, many of them being Members of Parliament or Parliamentary Candidates whose relationship with their constituencies kept them in close touch with public opinion. Moreover, when criticism arose in the House of Commons, or questions were asked there, it was well to have men who could speak on such matters from personal knowledge.

The earlier list of appointments contained names like those of Colonel Weigall (Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Archibald Weigall, K.C.M.G.), Major Waldorf Astor, M.P. (the Viscount Astor), Lieutenant-Colonel Granville Wheler, C.B.E., M.P., Lieutenant-Colonel the Earl of Caithness, C.B.E., Major Sir Henry Fairfax Lucy, Bt., Lieutenant-Colonel R. S. Webber, Colonel G. L. Bence-Lambert, C.M.G., Colonel W. Johnston Galloway, Lord Frederick Blackwood (Captain the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, D.S.O.), Major Eric Chaplin (the Viscount Chaplin), Major Guy Kindersley, C.B.E., M.P., Major Worthington-Evans

(the Right Honourable Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Bt., G.B.E.), Colonel Herbert H. Peel, C.B.E., Lieutenant-Colonel E. Larken, C.B.E., Colonel Sir Frank Beauchamp, Bt., Major G. M. A. Graham, C.B.E., Captain F. Towle (Sir Francis Towle, C.B.E.), Major the Right Honourable Harold Baker, P.C., Major the Viscount Churston, M.V.O., Colonel William F. Cahusac, C.M.G., and Captain Gordon Leith (Colonel Gordon Leith, C.B.). General Landon (Major-General Sir Frederick Landon, K.C.M.G.) was appointed Chief Inspector, and under his experienced and sympathetic direction and guidance these officers did invaluable and often little appreciated work.

It is interesting to know that in the early autumn of 1915 Mr. Stanley Baldwin's (the Right Honourable Stanley Baldwin, M.P.) name was before the Q.M.G. for an appointment as Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services in the Southern Command. The training would have been an excellent one for a future Prime Minister.

It was very amusing, and at the same time a lesson in the duty of shouldering work not altogether pleasant, to meet Major Waldorf Astor on Salisbury Plain during the trying winter of 1914-15 peering into improvised cook-houses, calling for improved diet sheets and kicking up a real old shindy because a mutton bone was thrown into the swill tub instead of being made into nourishing soup and the men given a hot basin of it before going to a cold bed on a winter night. The age, social or official position and worldly experience of these officers gave them an influence and a power for usefulness such as no ordinary young Staff Officer could have hoped to possess. They faced and for the most part succeeded in conquering amazing difficulties. They had a delicate position, and, in effect, their instruction were to walk softly, but to carry a big stick. The big stick was an adverse report on the administration of a formation, and it says much that the big stick had to be used but seldom. Lord Astor and Sir Archibald Weigall were amongst the earliest Inspectors appointed and they set a standard of enthusiasm, hard work and efficiency that all their colleagues and successors strove to follow.

[By permission of the National Portrait Gallery.

SOME GENERAL OFFICERS OF THE GREAT WAR.

Painted in 1922 by John S. Sargent, R.A. Presented to the National Portrait Gallery by Sir Abe Bailey, Bt., K.C.M.G.

Left to right: Sir W. R. Birdwood; Rt. Hon. J. C. Smuts (South Africa); Rt. Hon. Louis Botha (South Africa); Lord Byng; Lord Rawlinson; Sir H. T. Lukin (South Africa); Sir J. Monash (Australia); Lord Horne; Sir G. F. Milne; F.-M. Sir H. H. Wilson; Sir A. H. Russell (New Zealand); F.-M. Lord Plumer; Sir J. S. Cowans; F.-M. Earl Haig; F.-M. Earl of Ypres (Viscount French); F.-M. Sir W. Robertson; Sir F. Stanley Maude; F.-M. Viscount Allenby; Sir W. R. Marshall; Sir A. W. Currie (Canada); Earl of Cavan; Sir C. M. Dobell.

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It is difficult to overpraise or overvalue their work. Sir Archibald Weigall was regarded by the Q.M.G. as the godfather of these officers, and the following account of their work from his pen is therefore of historic value :

" In the autumn of 1914 the expansion of the Army, sudden, rapid and enormous as it was, placed an overwhelming responsibility upon the Q.M.G.

" It became abundantly clear almost immediately that an appalling waste was taking place in connection, not only with the issue of rations, but preparation and consumption of food-stuffs and intelligent use of waste products, partly due to the rigidity of the Army administrative system which had grown up concurrently with no Administrative Staff side attached to the Staff College, and consequently a very great lack of officers who, either by inclination or training, were capable of dealing with a question which needed commercial capacity and administrative ability.

" An evidence of the rigidity of the system was that a certain amount of food-stuffs were issued by the Army Service Corps on indent from Regimental Authorities, totally irrespective of the type of man by whom they were to be consumed, or the training and actual service he was engaged in. In fact, there was no relative consideration whatever as between Issue and Controlled Consumption.

" Sir John Cowans approached this question with his customary courage and common sense. His method of dealing with it was only another indication of his capacity for taking the long view, and, when once his mind was made up, of delegating duties to subordinates, allowing them to run their own ' show ' and giving them his complete confidence. It was obvious that, owing to the above-mentioned conditions and the fact that the Administrative Staff were already over-burdened with work, it was quite impossible to deal with this question through existing Administrative Branches. He therefore created a new Branch at the War Office, which was designated Q.M.G.11, with its field of work which, in effect, controlled the journey, not only of the rations

provided by the taxpayer, but also those purchased by the soldier himself through his own Regimental Funds, from the time of issue, through the cookhouse, mess-room and subsequently dealing with the whole of the waste products from both cookhouse and mess-room. These eventually became from the financial point of view the most important aspect of the work.

"In each of the eight Home Commands an officer graded as a Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General, with the rank of Major and with the title of Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services, was appointed by the Q.M.G. and attached for discipline and administration to the Headquarters Staff of the Command to which he was posted.

"In addition to the fact that the sea of this administrative work was entirely uncharted, there was a very difficult, delicate, psychological and personal problem which had to be faced by each one of the Inspectors. If his work was to be effective he had got to become almost the 'detective' of the War Office by whom he was appointed and to whom he was responsible, all his reports going in duplicate to the War Office and to the Headquarters of the Command to which he was attached, whilst for purposes of discipline and internal administration he was wholly responsible to the Commander-in-Chief of the Command. This dual position inevitably placed a great responsibility upon the Inspector, and in the hands of tactless individuals would have provided a very fruitful field for petty personal strife.

"It reflects great credit on the general tact displayed that the whole of this work was successfully accomplished, adding enormously to the comforts of the soldier, and to the pocket of the taxpayer, and all carried out in an amicable administrative atmosphere.

"As soon as these Inspectors had had time to get into their saddles in the Commands and feel their way in creating a new administrative machine the fun really began.

"With no precedents to guide them, and unhampered by red tape and convention, a wide field was left to the

imagination and initiative of the Inspectors, whilst friendly rivalry as to financial results immediately sprang up, owing to the decision of General Landon to publish monthly statements of the records of the various Commands.

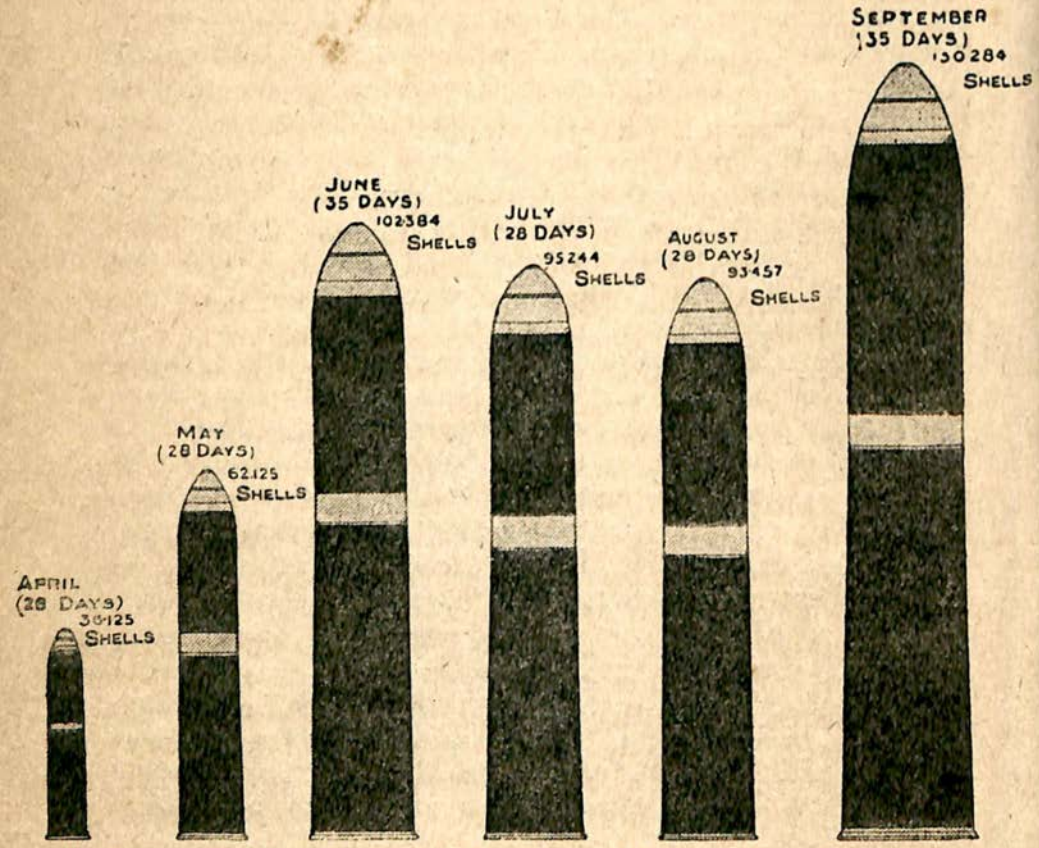
"Schools of Cookery for the training of cooks from all units were instituted, classes were held for young Regimental Officers at which lectures and demonstrations were given. Much literature was issued from the Inspector's office to every unit, and he, with his assistants and subordinates (Inspectors of Catering), was continuously employed in inspecting, the Northern Command alone having eight hundred units at this period. The whole of their Messing Books were forwarded to the Inspector's Office monthly, checked, audited and a complete summary sent to the War Office.

"Under this system the amount of savings in kind (unrequired rations) and cash from sale of waste products ran into millions over the period of the War.

"This great work would not have been accomplished had it not been for the energy and enthusiasm with which the majority of the young officers of the New Armies threw themselves into it. On the other hand, many of the old Regular Officers (Dug-outs) held up their hands in horror at the idea of any form of commercialism being introduced into soldiering, and still worse at the thought that any officer or gentleman should concern himself with soup, swill and dripping! There was also a type of officer who emphatically declined to agree that the taxpayer had any concern in the consumption of rations when once issued.

"The encounters with officers of this description provided an endless source of amusement and many situations, not without humour, arose. Sometimes, too, recognised rules and regulations had to be disregarded. On one occasion in one of the Commands six thousand troops drawn from different units had been ordered by the War Office to a certain camp, but no provision had been made for any cook to accompany them. An 'S.O.S.' arrived from the camp one night to the Inspector of

Quartermaster-General's Services of the Command asking for help. This officer immediately transported the whole of his Cookery School, composed of men under training from different units in the Command, by special train to the Instructional Camp, where they, in turn, gave some



Eighteen-pounder shells produced from cookhouse by-products saved in the Southern Command between April and September, 1916.

rudimentary instructions, and after a few days left the camp comfortable and contented.

"Dealing with waste products became in the end a subject of the greatest national importance. Owing to the shortage of fats in the country, the provision of nitro-glycerine necessary for high explosives had become really

grave, and every means was being explored by the Ministry of Munitions to provide the necessary fats.

" It was obvious to the Inspectors of Quartermaster-General's Services that from Military cookhouses, mess-rooms and swill-tubs, an immense amount of fats was being wasted. Steps were immediately taken to control and conserve the whole of these waste products; bones also were preserved and sold: the old-time system of allowing these to be dealt with independently by cooks as personal perquisites being stopped and cooks' pay being permanently increased on a sliding scale according to results of the sales of waste products.

" Contracts were made with the great firms dealing with these materials, huge sums accruing to units, whilst immense quantities of crude fat found its way into high explosive shells; in fact, after one year of this system being in operation in the Home Commands enough fat was conserved from the soldiers' food to provide glycerine for eighteen million 18-pounder shells!

" In July, 1916, Sir John Cowans sent the Inspector of the Northern Command to examine and report on conditions in all Base Camps and Lines of Communication of the Armies in France, to see how far, if at all, the system which had worked so admirably in the Home Commands could be applied to the Armies in the Field.

" As a result of Colonel Weigall's report a new branch was created at General Headquarters under Lieutenant-Colonel E. Larken, who had been an Assistant-Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services in the Northern Command. This branch started with one Inspector attached to Headquarters of the Inspector-General of Communications. It ended by a Senior Inspector being attached to General Headquarters with thirty officers under him."

Sir Archibald Weigall will forgive a story that further proves the work of the Inspectors had its funny side. When the appointments were created, they were given the red hat-bands which were the prized, envied, or (it is said) sometimes despised emblems of the General Staff. All went well until some time later the War Office had a fit

of sartorial activity and the Staff was divided into innumerable sections, each with a different coloured hat-band such as green, blue, brown, black (for Chaplains), and so on. The Inspectors, who were allotted blue, disliked losing their attractive red hats and gold oak leaves and becoming a sort of cross between a German bandsman and a rural police inspector. The battle of the hats was fought right up to the War Office, and Cowans was asked not to permit his Inspectors to lose any of the status which was so essential if they were to carry out their difficult duties satisfactorily. To one of them who (as a personal friend) put the point to him, he said: "My dear fellow, I appointed you one of my Inspectors because of your personality, and if you cannot carry out your duties successfully on that, no red hat is going to help you!"

At the same time, Cowans knew well the value of status and rank in the Army, but he was not going to interfere in what was, after all, a matter for the General Staff and the Adjutant-General. Some of the Commanders-in-Chief took the matter so seriously that they, as a concession, were permitted to allow their Inspectors to wear the red hat within the limits of their own Command. Rumour had it that, where this permission was taken advantage of, the Inspectors could be seen whipping off a red and on a blue one as their car crossed the frontiers of their own Command into a neighbouring one where the rule did not obtain! Rumour—quite busy in the Army even during War—also had it that the General Staff, being jealous of the privileged position of the Inspectors, got the red hats taken away through spite; but there is no evidence that this was really so.

Although primarily responsible for the innovation of appointing these Inspectors, Cowans was careful to give full credit where it was due for the effective carrying out of his schemes, and he declared:

"The results achieved may be attributed largely to the inspections by the Chief Inspector of the Quartermaster-General's Services, the Instructors in Catering and Messing Auditors in the several Commands. The successful carrying out of the system was also due to the hearty

co-operation of the General Officers Commanding and Officers Commanding-in-Chief throughout the Kingdom."

By this means, too, not only was the messing of the men improved, but that of the officers also. The army ration was always the backbone of every officers' mess; being supplemented by local purchase and, especially overseas, by food from home. In most of the Home Commands every effort was made by Commanding Officers to keep down the expense of messing, and in some cases it was very low indeed.

§ 5

A great deal of nonsense was at various times written and talked about waste and bad feeding in the Army. Many people had an idea that no attention was being paid to the subject; but, as has been clearly shown, such was never the case. Those in authority soon came to realise, only too well, that ultimately it would be a war of attrition and that, since everything depended on food, England was in a very precarious position.

In the early part of the War some of the London papers came out one morning with a big headline entitled "River of Bread." It gave a lurid account of how thousands of loaves were seen floating down a tributary river and into the Avon at Salisbury.

As showing the direct personal interest of the Sovereign and his anxious care for the welfare of the country, it is worth recording that before noon that same day an Officer of the Royal Household arrived at the Headquarters of the Southern Command in Salisbury for the purpose of receiving an explanation. The result of his enquiries enabled him to reassure His Majesty as to the care taken to prevent waste.

What had happened was this:

A certain unit passing through the Command, as many did on their way to the Coast, was moving out of camp at daybreak. Their Quartermaster, who was apparently a novice, indented for and drew full bread rations on the

morning of their departure. There was a standing order that all units marching out were to leave their store-rooms clean and empty. This foolish person, instead of returning the bread to the Army Service Corps, and probably preoccupied with many things, felt he must at all events obey standing orders; so he procured a fatigue party and told them to fling the loaves into the river. As there are five rivers running into the Avon at Salisbury they eventually landed under the astonished eyes of the Commander-in-Chief. Obviously no amount of care will prevent such things happening when you are dealing with untrained or partly-trained men. The incident, like many others, was grotesquely exaggerated but, in the long run, it did no harm, as when it became known throughout the Command that the King himself was vigilant and zealous for economy the moral effect was invaluable.

All sorts of people informed the Q.M.G. in the Press and by correspondence as to how they would "feed the Army"! Most of these offers were well meant, but many were foolish, simply because the writers did not understand all the difficulties of the situation.

It was said that the Navy had expert cooks and consequently no waste. But it was forgotten that the Navy was a professional and not an amateur service like the New Armies. Cooks, caterers and expert food-buyers were, they asserted (quite superfluously), sent into the firing-line, and untrained, knock-kneed, flat-footed inefficients put into the cookhouses. But it was not explained that this was not stupidity but an inevitable result of the voluntary system. If a man who was an expert cook in private life felt like showing bare knees in a kilt and sticking Germans with a bayonet instead of sausages with a fork there was nothing to prevent him. Even when the compulsory system came in, recruits were, as far as possible, allowed to choose their units; and the very people who made hymns in public regarding army wastefulness would have been the first to shriek about interfering unnecessarily with men's freedom. Not even a Member of the Army Council could make a man be a cook if he did not want to be one, and Providence has somehow

lamentably failed to provide mankind with an infallible formula for turning bad cooks into good ones.

Faulty organisation was not an unusual charge, but in a large voluntary army it is, broadly speaking, generally necessary to give every man duties to which he is unaccustomed, and the laudable desire to find at all times square pegs for square holes has sometimes to be given the go-by.

Army Schools of Cookery were not supposed to turn out trained cooks, but to lay a foundation which could be built upon in practice when the man returned to his unit. As for using discrimination and avoiding misfits, it is difficult to understand how this could be done successfully when the main object was to train men as rapidly as possible and push them into the firing-line.

That because of the lack of ploughmen the price of potatoes jumped up daily, was admitted; but this was also a result of the voluntary system and the absence of anything like National Service; and by National Service is meant the skilled ploughman and the skilled munition maker each serving the community in his proper place. It was said, for instance, that the Army should have made an extensive use of gas cooking—but this was mere nonsense. Apart from the question of keeping more men at coal mining than might otherwise have been necessary, there certainly would have been no possibility of cooking by gas in the trenches in France or Gallipoli—and all the training received by the cooks at home was designed to prepare them for service abroad.

An Officer Commanding a unit a thousand strong handled well over eight thousand pounds every year in connection with the men's messing. If by-products were advantageously disposed of, messing efficiently managed, and the canteen accounts and purchases carefully scrutinised, he had in hand every month an additional sum of something like fifty or sixty pounds.

All this he was supposed to use for the improvement of the men's messing, say by giving them supper in the evenings or by achieving a more varied dietary through the purchase of fresh fruit and so on. He might also use it

for providing recreation in the way of footballs, indoor games, cricket gear, buying flower or vegetable seeds for Regimental gardens, or indeed dispose of it in any way that directly added to the amenities of life for the men. What he might not do was to spend it on training equipment or for show. The view of the Army Council was that inasmuch as the money was saved directly or indirectly out of the men's rations or was the result of economy in expending their commuted allowance—as the fivepence halfpenny per man per day was officially described—it was entirely theirs.

Inspecting Officers were therefore required to keep a sharp look-out for any irregularities on this head. When such took place they were mostly the result of ignorance, although some Commanding Officers were inclined to look upon the money as their personal property and not as a fund held in trust for the men. Royal Air Force units, because of their lack of administrative experience, erred in this respect much oftener than others.

It was, however, an officer commanding an infantry unit who was hauled over the coals for spending the men's money on buying a thousand "swagger sticks." It was firmly pointed out to him that they were neither food nor recreation and that he was, moreover, guilty of employing labour in making luxuries in time of war.

A Royal Air Force Training School, where they had a fair average of accidents, went on for many months buying coffins for all their casualties until an Inspecting Officer blew in one day and laid it down that the utility of a coffin to a dead man was debatable, but no one had ever succeeded in establishing its value to the living. The same unit spent large sums on buying wreaths; this also was forbidden on the ground that they were not a part of the dietary, nor had they any real recreational value.

It will therefore be seen that the Inspectors of Quartermaster-General's Services required the wisdom of a Solomon, the diplomacy of a Talleyrand, and the detective ability of a Sherlock Holmes.

One of their most essential and least agreeable duties

was to prevent the soldier being robbed in his own canteen. Both under the old system of private contractors and under the successive systems known as the Army Canteen Committee and the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes all canteens were, as we have seen, staffed by civilians. The staff was supposed to be unfit for military service, but in the early days of the War many who should have joined the New Armies hid behind an Army Canteen counter. However, as the various Military Service Acts were passed, all the fit men were weeded out and the management had to put up with a very inferior and sometimes very undesirable type of man. The situation was enormously improved by the employment later on of women in large numbers. When it was pointed out to the Q.M.G. that if a woman might not be allowed to hand a cup of tea or coffee to a soldier in a canteen she certainly should not be allowed to make munitions for twelve or fourteen hours a day, he saw the point at once, and agreed, but many senior officers—some occupying high positions too—strongly objected.

All sorts of absurd ideas were ventilated. Salisbury Plain would be overrun with war babies! The women would have to be segregated behind barbed wire. Guarding them and providing special accommodation for them would throw an impossible burden on the military authorities, and so on. Many had not yet learned that if you treat Tommy like a gentleman he seldom fails to act like one. When it was suggested early in 1916 that women should be employed in all canteens, not only to release men but to provide a service of comfort, cleanliness and such tidy and cheerful surroundings as no man could, it was proposed that it would be well to begin with the canteens of the Third Australian Division then on Salisbury Plain.

The old women dressed up in men's uniform were aghast. The Australians! It was pointed out to them that in his native land an Australian is accustomed all his life to claiming and receiving shelter at a lonely station often only inhabited by women when the men are away, and is therefore in the habit from his earliest days of treating unprotected women with chivalry. In no

canteens were the women employees treated better or with more deference than in those of the Australian Lines. Let it be said once and for all that no woman in a canteen, in the Women's Legion, in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps or anywhere else was ever approached by a soldier with undue freedom unless she first indicated that such attentions would be welcome.

One of the very first to see the possibilities and advantages of employing women was Lady Londonderry (the Marchioness of Londonderry, D.B.E.). Even before she started the Women's Legion she had unofficially been doing a great deal to encourage the idea. We will therefore pause here to give an account of the inception and work of the Women's Legion and, as in the case of the feeding of the Army, will anticipate events in the order of time.

It is not sufficiently appreciated how much the inclusion of women in the Army was due originally to the foresight and goodwill of Cowans as Q.M.G.

Very soon after the outbreak of War in 1914, it became obvious that there must be some organisation of women on a large scale, not only for emergency work, but for all those regular employments where they could take the places of men who could be called to the colours. Increasingly obvious did it become as the months passed that, unless the women came forward, not in hundreds but in thousands, the work of the country could not be carried on.

With this end in view, the Women's Legion was formed by Lady Londonderry in July, 1915. Originally an off-shoot of the Women's Volunteer Reserve, the Legion was destined to outstrip by far its parent in numbers, and to develop upon other and broader lines. Voluntary workers were not indeed asked for, apart from organisers and for Committee work, except in the case of the Ambulance Section, which served several hospitals, and in the work done by its members of the Londonderry House Hospital as orderlies left a wonderful record of discipline and devotion to duty. Otherwise the endeavour of the Women's Legion was to replace working men by working

women, irrespective of class, and it was felt that a recognised rate of pay was desirable to ensure the necessary control and to maintain the work at a high standard. The object of the Legion, in fact, as set forth in its Constitution, was " to provide a capable and efficient body of women, whose services could be offered to the State as might be required, to take the place of men needed in the firing-line or in other capacities."

The organisation was entirely non-political and undenominational, and it was to comprise several sections, both military and civilian, all independent of each other, under their own officials, with a President (Lady Londonderry), a Council and an Executive consisting of both men and women, at Headquarters.

At its formation the Legion was composed of a cookery, a canteen and an ambulance section, and to these was very shortly added the agricultural section, the outcome of the Committee formed in April of that year by the late Lord Chaplin [1] and the late Lord Long (the Viscount Long of Wraxall) [2] for the employment of women in agriculture. This section, which continued to the end of the War to do very useful work in training in specialised subjects such as dairy farming and horticulture, may be regarded as the forerunner of the Great Land Army to be organised in 1917 by Government, just as the military sections of the Legion, the cooks and the motor drivers, were the pioneers of the Women's Services—in one of which, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, the cooks were ultimately to be absorbed.

One of the first innovations that suggested itself to Lady Londonderry was the expedient of replacing male army cooks by women, and it should be placed on record that it was owing to the approval, support and far-sightedness of Cowans that the experiment of substituting women cooks for men was given a trial, and that the scheme which was evolved in these early days was sanctioned by the War Office.

In July consent was given by the Q.M.G. to the

[1] Henry, 1st Viscount Chaplin, died 1923. [2] Died 1924.

provision of cooks by the Women's Legion for the Convalescent Hospitals at Eastbourne, Epsom and Dartford at the rate of £26 per annum pay and free rations and accommodation. The scheme very soon emerged from its experimental stage, and after a few months' trial this section of the Women's Legion was recognised as a War Office Department, and its activities came under the control of the Inspector of Army Catering. The Military Cookery Section may indeed lay claim to the distinction of being, with the exception of the Army Nursing Sisters, the first body to be officially recognised and accepted by the War Office under the scheme for the employment of women in the Army. It was regarded as a final recognition of the women cooks' success when, in 1916, Army Council Instructions were drafted in regard to their management and employment.

The first Commandant was Miss Lilian Barker, lent for this essential war work by Sir Robert Blair of the London School Board. A few months later, however, this experienced lady's services were commandeered by another Government department, and she was appointed Lady Superintendent of the women in the Ordnance Factories at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich. Her duties were taken over in December, 1915, by Mrs. Burleigh Leach (Dame Florence Simpson, D.B.E.), who was later to become Chief Woman Controller of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. Mrs. Leach's sister, Mrs. Long, who was, unhappily, drowned in the sinking of the *Warilda* by the enemy in July, 1918, on her return from an inspection in France, undertook the very considerable work of secretary (honorary at the beginning); and early in 1916 offices were provided for the Cookery Section at the Duke of York's School, Chelsea.

All innovations are hard to introduce and establish, and, if it had not been for the encouragement and civility which the Women's Section invariably met with from the Quartermaster-General's Branch, in which Branch they were incorporated, coupled with the tact and discretion of the ladies themselves, some of the departmental obstacles could scarcely have been surmounted. That they were, and so successfully, was also due in part to the fact

[*From a picture by Percy Anderson.*

DAME FLORENCE SIMPSON.
(Mrs. Burleigh Leach.)

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that from the outset it was stipulated by the President that, in all matters appertaining to the women, a woman superintendent was to be at the head and responsible in each camp for the welfare and behaviour of those under her charge, and also for the discipline.

A waiting-list of women was kept at Headquarters and the Officer Commanding applied to the Commandant of the Women's Legion when he required any member of the female staff for his camp. These were all selected by the Commandant, who also made the necessary arrangements for the reception of the women and visited all the camps for inspection periodically.

Head-cooks were put in charge of the large kitchens and the rest of the staff was composed of ordinary cooks and waitresses for the Officers' Mess, in addition to housemaids at the different Military Camps. Cooks were provided for Convalescent Hospitals, Base Depots, Rest Camps and Officers' Messes. Women instructresses holding high diplomas in cooking were appointed in December, 1915, to teach men cooks a more economical and profitable method of preparing the food suited to war-time conditions. Each woman on joining served a probation of one month, at the end of which time, if satisfactory, she signed on for the duration of the War.

The demand grew apace, and so far exceeded the supply that, in January, 1917, the Army Council appealed for one thousand women to enrol in the Legion as cooks, with the result that over twenty thousand replies were received. At the same time the Secretary brought out a medical certificate for the women to have signed before being posted, and a large percentage of the applicants were found to be unfit. Even so, however, about seventeen thousand women were at this time enrolled; they were of a very superior class, many of the cooks and waitresses having been in excellent situations as domestic servants, and accepting a considerable drop of salary from motives of patriotism. And this, it is to be feared, was one of the primary causes of the outcry of the housewife over the domestic servant shortage which is to be heard to the present day.

At this date it is difficult to realise what heart-burnings, coupled with genuine anxiety and distrust of such an innovation, was caused not only amongst the officials of the particular branch in the War Office under the Q.M.G. but amongst Commanding Officers and their Staffs, by the suggestion that it was possible that women might be called upon to act as substitutes for men in any capacity whatsoever in the British Army.

In February, 1917, it was decided that the Women's Legion Military Cookery Section was to cease to exist as a separate organisation under the Q.M.G., and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps under the Adjutant-General's Department was formed to serve both in France and in England. In consequence of this, th entire Military Cookery Section was taken over and became the nucleus of the big scheme for the employment of women in France, known at first as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and afterwards as Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, of which Mrs. Chalmers Watson (Dr. A. M. Chalmers Watson, C.B.E.) was the first Controller, being succeeded in a few months by Mrs. Burleigh Leach.

When Lady Londonderry was asked to address the first detachment of Legion cooks on their departure with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps for France, she found a well-drilled, healthy, hard-working set of women, of whom she felt she had reason to be justly proud. These women never ceased to be members of the Legion and were allowed to wear the Legion badge on their uniforms, the bronze figure of Victory, with the laurel wreath and the motto *Ora et Labora*, which some of them not inaptly referred to as " the lady with the frying-pan." Though they and many others became loyal members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, they are to this day proud of having belonged, and still belonging, to the pioneer organisation.

§ 6

We must now leave the men, their needs, and all that was being done to meet them for a little time and see

what Cowans was doing about horses and how his scheme, so long and carefully prepared, worked out in practice. Like feeding the subject will be dealt with comprehensively, not chronologically.

In *The Times* of January 5, 1915, appeared an article, written by a correspondent, at the Q.M.G.'s suggestion, in order that the public might know how the Remount Scheme had worked. It contained the following tribute to those concerned:

"This result was only obtainable owing to the untiring energy of the Deputy-Assistant-Director of Remount Circles, and to the response by the civilian purchasers concerned. The organisation, young and newly-organised as it was, succeeded in putting the total number of horses required into their places with the units wanting them by the dates which the Army Council had laid down as necessary for the despatch of the Expeditionary Force and the defence of the country by the Territorial Force.

"It was not to be expected that this result could be obtained without a certain number of unsuitable horses being purchased, and the Remount Directorate has always told the Government that successful mobilisation in time of national peril could only be done if the whole spirit of the country was with it. Where people conspired to cheat the nation by substituting unsound horses on mobilisation for those actually bought, or by slipping in bad horses, satisfactory purchase for the Government's urgent requirements was not always possible. Unfortunately certain individuals in England, and to a far greater extent in Ireland, used the national peril for their own gain. Happily this was exceptional, and in certain cases the War Office has already been able to bring offenders to justice.

"Reviewing the situation generally, the Remount Directorate at the War Office, presided over by Major-General Birkbeck, and its officers distributed over the country, may congratulate themselves on having placed 36,000 useful horses in the ranks of the Expeditionary Force, 80,000 useful horses for the Territorial Force, and 18,000 horses for the Reserve formation within twelve

days of the order to mobilise. It should also be realised how much the competent control of the railway authorities contributed to the distribution of the horses to the units requiring them. Since the completion of mobilisation the large increments to our Forces and the large demands to replace the natural wastage due to extremely arduous operations have been successfully met during the last three months from the resources in the United Kingdom. Horses are still flowing to units in the field of a sample equal to that with which they were first equipped, and some 60,000 more have been purchased since mobilisation was completed for drafts and new formations."

Besides giving the Remount Officers and civilian purchasers authority to continue buying in the open market in the United Kingdom for the War Office and, when the time came, for the Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture as well, the Q.M.G. was able largely to increase the personnel of the Canadian Purchasing Commissions and to organise another for duty in South America—chiefly in the Argentine and Uruguay. A number of buyers were sent out to Australia to assist the Government of India, which had arranged to obtain horses for the War Office as well as for the Indian Army; attempts were also made to buy mules in Spain and Portugal, but these were not altogether successful, under four thousand being obtained.

The American Commissions continued their activities until the Armistice; the Canadian Commission, presided over by Major-General Sir Frederick Benson, formerly Director of Remounts, who was himself a Canadian, alone shipping nearly half a million horses and a quarter of a million mules from North America, with surprisingly few casualties, largely thanks to the Royal Army Veterinary Corps providing conducting officers for the voyage, and to the excellent arrangements for embarkation and disembarkation, especially when animals had to be slung, which, fortunately, was seldom.

" The average mortality from all causes in horse and mule freight-ships and transports conveying animals on

ocean routes," stated the Q.M.G., " was under one per cent for the whole War ; this is a very remarkable record, and may be attributed to the adequate measures taken by the Army Veterinary Service to ensure the health of the animals when shipped and their care on board ship. To illustrate the perfection to which arrangements were brought it may suffice to mention that out of a hundred and ninety-six ships which carried animals from Canada and America to England during 1918, seventy-six completed the voyage without losing a single animal."

The main demand for horses and mules was, of course, for the troops in France, but, as time went on, arrangements had to be made to supply other Expeditionary Forces. When the Australian and Canadian contingents were brought to Europe the Q.M.G.'s Department undertook to meet their needs and also, in March, 1916, to meet the needs of the Belgian Army. Eighteen thousand animals were also supplied to American Divisions in France.

Credit must be given to the English Hunts, among which may be mentioned the Badminton, the Quorn and the Pytchley, for putting their magnificent horses at the disposal of the War Office. For instance, when the Third Cavalry Division was formed at Windmill Hill, on Salisbury Plain, at the end of September, 1914, the Hunts provided many of the horses for the Seventh Brigade, which was composed of Household Cavalry, and Lord Derby assisted with a number of horses from his own stables. Many private owners refused to take any payment and most generously presented their horses to the nation.

The remounts from America were of a good stamp and proved, on the whole, remarkably easy to handle, but it was noticeable that they had not such good mouths as the English horses.

Opinions had differed as to the wisdom of using large numbers of mules for light draught work, but Cowans had always been in favour of them. He proved to be right, as everyone knows. The mules were a success and when

treated kindly were quite tractable and were not so liable to skin diseases as the horses. In fact the mule does not altogether deserve the sinister reputation it acquired during the War. It was usually regarded as a bundle of vice, a synonym for contrariness and became a peg upon which the comic papers hung their jokes. This often arose from the fact that mules were (of necessity) put under the charge of men who knew little about horses and less about mules, for just as an indifferent bridge player always complains of bad cards, so a poor horse-master complains of his animals. As a matter of fact, mules are both willing and intelligent if properly looked after, and if their little weaknesses are understood. People began by hating the mule and ended by loving him, and it would hardly be too much to say that he did more towards winning the War than the horse. What the transport of the Army would have done without the mule it is difficult to say, and Cowans's confidence was entirely justified by results.

§ 7

From the outbreak of hostilities the number of animals on the establishment of the Army—25,000—increased until, in 1917, it reached 800,000, a figure which did not include some 50,000 camels, bullocks and donkeys.

The accommodation of these remounts presented to the Q.M.G. a problem little less serious than that of obtaining the remounts themselves. At the outbreak of the War the accommodation available was for no more than seventeen hundred remounts, and it was raised to fifty thousand. The chief depots were at Shirehampton, near Bristol; Latham Park, Ormskirk, near Liverpool; and Swaythling and Romsey, near Southampton, where, before distribution, the animals were kept under veterinary observation for three weeks. Shirehampton was a straggling depot, built on low-lying ground, but it was, nevertheless, in an excellent situation to receive horses which arrived from America and were disembarked at

Avonmouth Docks. The Ormskirk depot was also a distributing centre for horses and mules that were landed at Liverpool. It, too, covered a large area, and for some time the mud was very bad, but a railway line was constructed from the docks so that, when landed, horses could be sent direct to the camp.

The Swaythling depot was used for the reception of remounts prior to despatch to Expeditionary Forces. Like the other two, it covered an extensive area, and until the narrow roads were widened it was difficult of approach, the ground becoming much cut up while building was in progress.

The principle of establishing the Remount Depots on a scattered basis was adopted originally with a view to taking every precaution against epidemics. It was recognised later, however, that this added greatly to the difficulties of supervision and when the time came the Q.M.G. decided to build Romsey depot on a more concentrated scale, with good results. It covered a small area, was built on a gravel site, and owing to the huts and stables being placed close together it was easier to administer than the others. It was, too, the only one on a purely military basis with an entire military personnel, although as the War went on the civilian depots were organised more and more on military lines. Veterinary hospitals were attached to all three depots.

Many small centres were established all over the country, mostly for the reception of sick horses. Some of these were managed by women, with women grooms to look after two or three horses. This arrangement proved very successful. Although the hours were long and work exhausting, these ladies turned out excellent horsemasters and performed most valuable service.

The demand for men who were used to the handling of horses naturally increased with the number of remounts and in many cases could only be met by training men who were without previous knowledge, for the Remount Department personnel increased from the peace establishment of 350 officers and other ranks to 21,000 in 1917.

In this connection Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy Shaw,

who has had a wide and varied experience of horses, both in peace and war, tells the following stories:

"During the War I had several quaint personal experiences with men in mounted units who had never met a horse before. In one case I was detraining a brand new Divisional Artillery and rescued a small man who was being dragged along the platform by a recalcitrant gun-horse. I asked him what he had been before he enlisted, and he answered: 'Me? I was a watchmaker, and I'll take a damned good care I stick to watchmaking when this war is over.'

"Another day I was issuing horses to a unit which at the same moment was drawing harness from the Ordnance, issued, as harness is, in detail. I admit it is not easy for an expert to put all the straps together, but I saw a pathetic figure take a bit and force it into the mouth of a bored gun-horse. Naturally it dropped out on to the ground. The man repeated the effort three times, and I then asked him what he was trying to do? Said he: 'This brute won't hold the thing in his mouth for me to buckle them straps to!' He imagined, I suppose, that the bridle was to be built up piecemeal on the horse's head.

"Yet these men in a few months could turn a six-horse team through a gate at a trot."

Cowans was able to help out individual remount depots from time to time with the co-operation of civilian organisations which employed labour unfit for military service, but the attraction of better-paid civilian work (increasing with the shortage of men and the consequent rise of wages) made it very difficult to maintain these non-military depots. In this connection the assistance given to the Remount Department by Mr. Frank Bibby and Mr. T. Kinnersley at their large and well-managed depots in Shropshire must be mentioned, and also the admirably managed Civilian Remount Depot at Gloucester under Captain H. P. de Winton, where the cost per horse was less than at any other depot in the United Kingdom.

The lack of necessary horse equipment in the early stages of the War rendered training very difficult. The necessity of issuing harness and saddlery to the Regular

and Territorial units which followed the Regular Expeditionary Force put a great strain on the Q.M.G.'s Department and further supplies were only procured at first with the utmost difficulty. At Tidworth, for example, where the Reserve Cavalry Regiments were formed, there were very few bridles and saddles—on one occasion, amongst a thousand horses, there were only fifty-seven bridles and no saddles at all—so that even the exercising of horses was not easy. All this was inevitable, and again it is well to quote Cowans's own words to show how formidable were the obstacles with which he had to contend:

"In dealing with the enormous amount of harness and saddlery required, two difficulties arose: First, the shortage of leather; and secondly, the very limited numbers of firms capable of making the military pattern of harness and saddlery, more particularly the leather required to stand the hard wear of active service. Moreover, the completion of sets of harness depended not only upon the leather workers, but also upon the makers of steel rapid release furnishings (peculiar to our military harness), which are made by two distinct trades, viz., stamping firms and finishing firms. The output of these at the beginning of the War was infinitesimal compared with our requirements after mobilisation, and both trades had to be organised and expanded. Moreover, there was a strong temptation for firms to continue to secure foreign or private orders at the beginning of the War.

"It was, therefore, necessary to go to America and Canada for harness (and also to India for saddlery), and organise supplies from there. At one time harness and saddlery was being manufactured in twenty-four different cities in the States, extending from San Antonio in the South to St. Paul in the North, and to Omaha in the West; but it was not until the end of February, 1915, that any large supplies came in from America. Even so, the rapid mobilisation of successive divisions prevented for some considerable time the accumulation of any reserve. Moreover, the congestion of the ports and the railways further delayed the distribution of the supplies

arriving in this country. From August, 1914, the set of harness in use had increased from forty thousand to five hundred and eighteen thousand in December, 1915, but by that date difficulties of supply had been overcome.

"As an illustration of the interdependence of the various trades upon one another, it may be mentioned that on the suggestion of a civilian flax dealer special measures were taken to procure a heavy flax crop in Ireland in 1915, in order to provide the flax thread used in the manufacture of harness, saddlery and clothing, as the supplies normally obtained from Belgium were not, of course, forthcoming."

As the output in the United Kingdom was developed it became possible to reduce, and then to stop, purchases in America, and the expansion of the home output is shown by the fact that, besides supplying the Expeditionary Forces in France, Egypt, Mesopotamia and East Africa and, in 1916, equipping the increased forces at Salonica on a pack basis, it was still possible for the Q.M.G. to provide the Russian Army with thirty-six thousand sets of machine-gun saddlery, and thirty thousand sets of saddlery, as well as many thousand sets of artillery harness. The Serbians were also supplied with some thousands of sets of pack saddlery.

§ 8

Besides the demands for accommodation, personnel to handle the horses, and the supply of harness and saddlery, the expansion of the Remount Department brought another pressing need in its train and that was the provision of adequate veterinary services.

It was here that Cowans was confronted with some of the gravest of his difficulties connected with the supply and conditioning of animals for the forces. For the mobilisation of the Expeditionary Force some two hundred veterinary officers were required. Of that number only a little more than half was available. Even the bringing of the establishment up to the strength was only possible after considerable delay, for fully-qualified

men alone could be employed, and they were not easy to find. The vacancies were, however, filled eventually by giving temporary commissions to civilian veterinary surgeons, but as the New Armies grew, so did the demand increase. Many retired veterinary officers offered their services, and Major-General Sir Frederick Smith, C.B., who had previously been head of the Army Veterinary Department at the War Office came forward and took charge of veterinary services in the Southern Command, where the majority of the remounts were located.

In some cases it was found possible to employ local civilian veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom to meet the emergencies that arose, but they were not enough. Matters were not made easier by the well-meaning but irritating cranks and busybodies, who, with no knowledge of the difficulties to be faced, pestered those concerned with suggestions of the most impracticable nature Nevertheless, to use Cowans's own words, "by dint of constant advertisement, appeals both through professional organisations and individually to every eligible veterinary surgeon in the United Kingdom, by the assistance of the Colonies in sending home suitable graduates in response to our requests, and by means of the Military Service Acts, it was ultimately found possible on a minimum basis to meet all demands for veterinary officers required to complete the establishments of Expeditionary Forces, India and Home Commands.

"Early in 1918 the distribution of officers was very carefully reviewed, and many changes were carried out in order to economise personnel and increase professional efficiency. By this redistribution it was possible to increase considerably the number of officers in India, Mesopotamia and the Sudan, without adding to the existing officer cadre of the Corps. At the same time the number of civil veterinary practitioners employed in the United Kingdom and Ireland was greatly reduced.

"In July of 1918, the supply of young graduates from the British schools was practically exhausted, but there was still a certain number of veterinary practitioners who might be made available for military duty. In order

to deal with these a Veterinary Tribunal was formed in September, 1918, and had only begun to function when the Armistice was declared. During the short duration of its activity the Tribunal was able to place a few practitioners at the disposal of the Military Authorities, and there can be no doubt that had it been formed earlier in the War the difficulty in obtaining suitable candidates for commissions in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps might have been greatly lessened."

The establishment of officers and other ranks in the Corps rose from five hundred in August, 1914, to twenty-seven thousand, five hundred. In addition to their ordinary duties, the Corps had to train and keep the Army supplied with farriers and shoeing-smiths, for the increased demands could not be met by the men from the civil trade. A School of Farriery was established at Romsey in 1915; two more were added at home and one in France, and not least among their valuable services was the replacement of the insufficiently-trained "cold-shoers" by competent shoeing-smiths; the fact that the Quartermaster-General's Department provided over sixty million shoes for horses and mules during the War will give some idea of their activities.

Cowans, generous as he always was in giving recognition where it was due, was glad to put on record the splendid spirit of co-operation shown by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals:

"The value of the assistance rendered by the Royal Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was very considerable. In 1914 the Society released its inspectors in order that they might enlist in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps (where most of them proved valuable as non-commissioned officers), and, in addition, did much to obtain suitable recruits for the Corps by canvassing, and by the judicious selection of likely volunteers. The Society purchased and supplied in large quantities the material for buildings and horse tents for the purpose of veterinary hospitals with the British Expeditionary Force in France; also a number of horse ambulances, both motor and horse drawn. Other important gifts were:

several complete sets of engines and machinery for chaff cutting and corn cutting in veterinary hospitals; installations for horse-carcase economiser plants; electrically-driven apparatus for clipping and grooming; the purchase of the necessary equipment for the Central Research Laboratory at Aldershot. The total money expended in these gifts amounted to £150,000."

Some of the gifts sent in by private individuals, on the other hand, were amusing, if touching. One lover of animals forwarded a blanket large enough for a pony, bound with scarlet braid and the monogram G.R. roughly traced in the same material, while another, more economically inclined, but determined to do something, sent a set of soiled and part-worn bandages.

It was inevitable that the veterinary accommodation should expand enormously from the original units which went to France with the Expeditionary Force—no more than one base depot of veterinary stores, eight veterinary hospital sections, each for two hundred and fifty patients, and fourteen mobile sections. In time there were established in the various theatres eight base depots, eighteen veterinary hospitals for two thousand patients each and ten for one thousand two hundred and fifty each; eighty mobile sections, five convalescent depots for one thousand two hundred patients each and four camel hospitals for one thousand two hundred and fifty patients each. In addition to this, field and mobile sections and convalescent depots were provided from India.

At one time the number of animals under treatment in veterinary hospitals and convalescent depots at home and overseas reached ninety thousand, nevertheless Cowans declared that "there was no breakdown in the arrangements for the supply of veterinary equipment and medicines to meet all the requirements of the War, although at times the difficulties were very serious. During the War the equipment was modified, and those improvements in medical and surgical science which are applicable to the lower animals were as far as possible introduced."

Glanders and mange had been the most virulent epidemics from which animals had suffered in previous wars,

but from August, 1914, up to the Armistice the loss from glanders was negligible, and mange, from which mules suffered far less than horses, was kept well under control; on the other hand, horses (though not many mules) suffered terribly from ophthalmia, and hundreds went blind in consequence. It is perhaps worth noting that in Marlborough's Despatches of 1708-09 he refers to a "certain disease of the eyes" whereby his horses went blind, to his great inconvenience, and it may have been that some indigenous germ was churned up from the Flanders mud by the incessant shelling, for the disease did not become prevalent until 1916. It is said that trench fever was the fever from which our Armies in the Low Countries had suffered in the past. Possibly the germs of both diseases were awaiting resurrection.

The worst period in the condition of the horses in France was early in 1917, when the monthly wastage rose to seven per cent. This so concerned Cowans that he paid a brief visit to France in May, to enquire into the cause personally, and found that the artillery horses had suffered most, partly owing to overwork, but chiefly owing to clipping and lack of adequate shelter.

Fearing a serious outbreak of mange, the veterinary surgeons had insisted that all horses must be clipped, for disinfection purposes. The result on animals standing out in the open, up to their hocks in mud, during the bitter winter of 1916-17 may easily be imagined. They died like flies, but the clipping still went on. After Cowans's visit the question of whether horses should be clipped or not was left to Army Commanders to decide, and most of them had realised by that time that even a mangy horse was of greater value than a dead one. Subsequently horses were only clipped trace high, or not at all, and the horses lived. These are the facts. The most serious losses occurred on the Somme, where no shelter was available or possible at that time, whereas in the Ypres Salient matters were never quite so bad, since, to some extent, it was possible to contrive wagon-lines sheltered by buildings, and it is necessary to place on record that, from the time Cowans went over on his visit

of personal inspection, matters mended. The horse wastage never rose so high again, and later Cowans provided specific funds and materials for horse shelters.

A valuable improvement in the veterinary administration was the foundation of a new unit known as the Veterinary Evacuation Station, one of which was attached to each Corps Headquarters in France and, later, in Italy. The functions of these units were equivalent to that of the Casualty Clearing Stations; they received sick and wounded animals from the mobile veterinary sections, gave them prompt treatment and attention which they would not otherwise have received, and then passed them on to the veterinary hospitals. Eventually sixteen of these stations were established, and they undoubtedly prevented considerable animal suffering and did much to help keep down the wastage, the average of which, for the United Kingdom and all the theatres of war, was less than fourteen per cent.

It is necessary to compare this figure with the average annual wastage of animals in the South African War—ninety-three per cent—to appreciate the improved conditions. Cowans asserted that "the health of the animals at home and in all theatres was maintained at a higher standard than in any former war. This standard showed a steady improvement in the later stages of the War, with the result that after the demobilisation of animals began, there was no check, on account of disease, in the disposal of surplus animals."

This is a statement which cannot fail to give satisfaction to every humane man and woman who, with the welfare of animals at heart, deplores the necessity for their use in modern warfare; at the same time it requires one qualification, for the percentage of loss in the East African campaign, mainly due to tsetse fly, was almost incredibly high, reaching 89.5 in 1916.

§ 9

Of course, during 1915 Cowans had many important things to see to besides the feeding and housing of the

troops. There were visits to France, but these only took place when they were unavoidable; the daily routine work of his office was enormous. Policy had to be considered; he had to keep looking ahead; submarine risks and all the ordinary risks of war were causes of grave anxiety.

Towards the end of the year he began to be concerned about the transport situation and had serious doubts as to whether it was being viewed in France with a broad and comprehensive vision.

With that unnamable and indefinable quality which throughout his career stood him in such good stead, he sensed the future and foresaw that there were breakers ahead. In any matter connected with transport he had something that might not inaptly be described as second sight, a gift which, as has been suggested before, he had probably inherited and which may have owed a good deal of its development to his earliest associations.

Before the end of 1914 Lord Kitchener had sent Colonel Sir Percy Girouard, K.C.M.G., to France to examine the whole of the transport question on the Lines of Communications. General Girouard submitted a report which was, however, shelved; most probably because the authorities in France were not ready for any change and because they in a general sense resented anything that looked even faintly like interference or dictation from home. There can be no doubt but that a Commander in the Field must retain his right to exercise the most complete freedom and initiative; but in merely administrative matters this was sometimes carried too far, because the home authorities had time and opportunity to introduce experiments and improvements to an extent quite impossible in France but which, once they had been tested, might very often have been introduced overseas with great success.

We have seen with what clarity Cowans foresaw the necessity of employing women in the Auxiliary Services of the Army and with what eagerness he welcomed civilian help. He was enormously interested in the work of the Red Cross and, as far as his Department could, he did

everything possible to assist it. Sir Arthur Stanley (Colonel the Honourable Sir Arthur Stanley, G.B.E.) writes:

"We had a good deal to do with J. S. C. during the War in connection with motor ambulances—or, rather, with his Department, as I did not often have to trouble him personally. Whenever I did see him I was struck with the fact that, although he was running such an immense organisation, he was never too busy to see one. He very seldom kept one waiting, and when one did see him he was always cheerful and never in the least hurried or rattled."

During the year Princess Christian had obtained the advice of the Q.M.G. in connection with her desire to have made and present to the War Office for service in France a Red Cross train similar to the one Her Royal Highness had presented during the South African War, but of course larger and better equipped. It was in due course built for use on the Continent and shipped to France, the whole cost of which was personally collected by Her Royal Highness, whose name it bore. Composed of ten coaches, to which the War Office subsequently added two for sitting-up cases, it had a total length of seven hundred feet and could accommodate four hundred and fifty.

This splendid train was constructed by the Birmingham Railway Carriage Company under the personal direction of Sir John Furley, with the practical assistance of Mr. W. J. Fieldhouse. In the main, the arrangements for the wards followed the design of the train of 1900; the beds were supported on brackets in tiers, and were capable of being removed and used as stretchers, the patient thus being placed in his assigned berth without change. When not required the beds could be turned into a couch or seat. Each bed had its little table, with a small bracket for a cup and glass. The wards, which were constructed for thirty-six patients, were covered with linoleum, and the wash basins could be folded out of the way when not in use. A main kitchen, a surgery, a subsidiary kitchen, mess, and sleeping accommodation for the Staff were also provided.

Princess Christian raised £28,000 to defray the cost of the train, and her efforts were really remarkable. She did everything herself and the money practically all came from her personal friends.

On April 8, the Army Council addressed a letter to Her Royal Highness expressing their deep gratitude for this complete and splendidly equipped Ambulance Train presented for the use of the Army in France.

There were those who thought, or pretended they thought, that Cowans should not have concerned himself with such matters, which they somewhat contemptuously described as "civilian side-shows." The attitude was as short-sighted as it was untenable. The proof that Cowans was on right lines is the enormous difference all these activities meant to the comfort and well-being of the soldier. That no claims of any kind whatsoever interfered with his own work has been proved again and again. It is true that he saw a great deal of civilian society during the War and kept up his large private correspondence, yet this never entailed official work being done in a perfunctory way.

He was at all times careful to show the utmost courtesy to foreigners, gave special consideration to the Dominion and American troops, and in this way set an example that many others might with advantage have followed.

General Alderson (Lieutenant-General Sir Edwin Alderson, K.C.B.), who commanded the 1st Canadian Division and subsequently the Canadian Army Corps, puts the friendly and helpful attribute of Cowans quite clearly when he says:

"I saw a good deal of him in the early days of the War, when I was in command of the Canadian contingent on Salisbury Plain. I was often at the War Office, or writing there. Two points struck me very much:

"First, he was one of the few then at the War Office, perhaps almost the only one high up on the Staff there, who was not oppressed and depressed by Lord Kitchener's personality!

"Secondly, if ever I wrote him a private, or semi-private, letter, and I wrote several, on even trivial matters,

I *always* got an answer by return of post and in his *own handwriting!* I used to think it was marvellous how a man, who I knew was so busy and who had so much responsibility, could find time for this. It much greased the wheels of one's difficulties.

"I never at any time, either in private or official matters, saw Jack Cowans put off his stroke! Such a man makes an ideal Staff Officer."

Late in 1914 Princess Helena Victoria had heard through a friend who had a son at the Front that nothing whatever was being done in the way of providing refreshment and recreation for the men at the Bases. After sending for Sir Arthur Yapp, K.B.E., of the Young Men's Christian Association, Her Highness went direct to the Quartermaster-General. He at once said that, provided that the Y.M.C.A. undertook the necessary organisation and paid all the costs, he would at once give full facilities and provide transport. The Q.M.G. more than kept his promise, and the Army transported all the Y.M.C.A. supplies to the Front. In August, 1915, and again in May, 1916, the Quartermaster-General personally accompanied the Princess when she went on official visits of inspection to the Y.M.C.A. in France.

This was only one more example of his wonderful friendliness and his readiness to utilise every civilian and un-official agency for the comfort of the soldier.

Later, Her Highness suggested Concert Parties, and here again the Q.M.G. agreed, and gave not only his moral but his personal and material support.

§ 10

It is, however, high time to return to the theatres of war for the purpose of glancing at the great events which these administrative activities were such a prominent factor in making possible.

In February the Government had decided to send the Twenty-Ninth Division to the Dardanelles, and orders were issued for the employment of the Australian and New Zealand troops there, thus beginning one of the most

glorious and tragic episodes of the War. In the same month the First Territorial Division (the North Midland) left England for France and Cowans was proud that within six months of the outbreak of War the Force for which he had done so much should be able—in addition to fighting in France and elsewhere as units and providing for Home Defence—to put in the field a completely equipped Division second to none. During the month the First Canadian Division also left England for France, there to win undying fame.

In March Neuve Chapelle was fought, and Sir Ian Hamilton (General Sir Ian S. M. Hamilton, G.C.B.) was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean (Dardanelles) Expeditionary Force; the battle of Champagne, begun at the end of the previous December, concluded, and at the end of April the second Battle of Ypres began.

A clear sign of the fact that even then it was becoming generally recognised that the War would be protracted, and be one of supplies, was the first meeting in Paris, on June 3, of the Allied Conference on Economic War.

Our pre-occupations in Egypt and the Near East had been enormously extended when our troops landed in Gallipoli. On the administrative side of that campaign there can be no higher authority than General Altham, who was responsible throughout, as he was, later on, for the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and (as Q.M.G. in India) for Mesopotamia. General Altham says:

"The story of Gallipoli is well known from a fighting point of view, and will long live as an example of a very gallant, though unsuccessful, feat of arms. The cheerfulness and pluck with which the troops endured hardships—at times little inferior to those of the trenches in France during the first winter—will, it is to be hoped, ever stand out in the memories of their countrymen in Australia, New Zealand and the homeland. But few have realised and still fewer recall the administrative difficulties of maintaining those splendid divisions and brigades on the exposed tongue of land at Helles, on the precipitous cliffs of Anzac, and on the unsheltered shores of Suvla.

"At the outset, be it remembered, the Q. Staff at home was given to understand that the troops sent out were intended to give merely incidental assistance to the Fleet in forcing the Straits and that their real work could only commence when Constantinople was dominated by the guns of a victorious navy. Thus the administrative framework of the Lines of Communication and advanced bases, with their inspecting staff and departmental organisations, had not appeared needed and were not provided. Nor had the original embarkation of the troops sent from England been so planned as to permit of their being landed on a hostile shore in the face of an active and strongly entrenched enemy. The blame for this rests not on the Q.M.G.'s Department at home, but on the higher authorities, who had grasped with unskilled hands the functions of the General Staff, and lacked the military knowledge and experience requisite for the direction of difficult operations of war.

"Thus came about that most unfortunate delay of a month, entailed by the necessity of sending back to Alexandria the transports to re-sort the troops on board —a delay which grievously affected the chances of ultimate victory. Meanwhile the administrative machinery for the Expeditionary Force was supplied. The administrative problem was one of unusual complexity. It is an axiom of war that to obtain the best value out of the fighting capacity of troops, their supplies of food, clothing and warlike stores must be assured. A half-starved, ill-clothed man, however great his fighting quality and disciplined courage, must of necessity deteriorate physically and, unless he is of very exceptional fibre, is also apt to deteriorate morally. If too he is cut short of the full supply of ammunition, which modern war demands, his fighting efficiency, whoever the individual may be, cannot but be greatly impaired. Furthermore, the dictates of humanity, as well as the requirements of the national conscience, prescribe as a paramount obligation that the wounded and sick should receive skilful treatment, and such reasonable comfort as will alleviate their sufferings and tend to their early recovery.

"In a civilised theatre of war such as France and Flanders, with a friendly population, Lines of Communication well supplied with means of transport, railways, etc., and above all with a short sea passage between its ports and England, the maintenance of the British Army was assured, these factors making the task but one of good organisation and constant foresight and care. For the Gallipoli enterprise all these factors were lacking. The troops landed on inhospitable shores which gave no assistance to their maintenance. The landing places themselves were throughout the campaign subject to hostile artillery fire, which prohibited supplies and reinforcements being placed on shore, or sick and wounded embarked for evacuation, in the daytime.

"The submarine menace further forbade anything but small craft (other than fighting ships) approaching the Peninsula. Thus all supplies and stores, and all personnel brought out from England or elsewhere in transport and store-ships, had to be shifted into smaller vessels before they were sent up to the front. The nearest harbour where such transhipment was possible was Mudros, seventy miles to the south-west, a magnificent natural anchorage, but totally undeveloped in the matter of piers, landing places, storehouses, buildings, etc., and forming part of the island of Lemnos, which was almost entirely destitute of any resources helpful for purposes of military administration. Egypt was six days distant, England itself ten to twelve. To these difficulties must be added the constant needs of the daily evacuation of the wounded and sick from the Peninsula. In August, 1915, this evacuation averaged a thousand a day, a matter nominally falling within the sphere of the Adjutant-General's Department, but the responsibility for which as regards transport arrangements, and provision and equipment of hospitals, rested entirely on the Q. Staff.

"In Egypt, whither, as one of the Staff of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, I was transferred immediately after the first evacuation of Gallipoli, in December, 1915, the administration problems were of a simpler nature, but their volume was considerable. The

Expeditionary Force required re-organisation, rebuilding and re-equipping for a new task, and this process of reformation was complicated by the calls made on the new Egyptian Expeditionary Force for the despatch of large reinforcements both to France and Mesopotamia, the formations there despatched being replaced by fresh divisions of Australian and New Zealand troops. The special requirements too for an advance towards Palestine—camels, water pipes and railway material—were very different from those of the more primitive Gallipoli campaign. It was the steady work of preparation done under Sir Archibald Murray in Egypt in 1916 that later made possible Lord Allenby's (Field-Marshal the Viscount Allenby, G.C.B.) splendid victory. That work was an admirable example of the closest co-operation between Sir Archibald's General and Q. Staffs, under the guidance of a Commander-in-Chief with an exceptional experience and understanding of Staff control and direction, and with the constant support of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Sir William Robertson) and the Quartermaster-General (Sir John Cowans) at the War Office."

§ 11

Space must here be given to recording two events which, large as they loomed at the time, had consequences no one—least of all Germany—could have foreseen. During the first week of May a United States ship, the s.s. *Gulflight,* was torpedoed without warning by German submarines and the s.s. *Lusitania* was sunk. Thus did Germany herself start the movement which eventually brought America into the War.

Two days after the *Lusitania* tragedy the leading divisions of the New Armies left England for France. Authorised at the end of August, 1914, they were in France within eight months and a few days, and without the work of Cowans and his Department, allied to the magnificent enthusiasm of the men, they could not have been trained and got ready in this incredibly short time.

Later in May the last meeting of the British War Council was held; the battle of Ypres and Festubert ended, and on the 25th of that month Mr. Asquith formed a Coalition Ministry—another step on the way to unity.

In the early days of June the Allies conferred in Paris on the great questions of co-ordinating their economic efforts and their War policy and strategy, and two months later, the demand for munitions having grown beyond all capacity to supply them through existing channels, the Ministry of Munitions was formed. Further, as men were as urgently needed as munitions, the National Registration Act was passed into law.

In the autumn the battles of Loos, Artois and the Second Battle of Champagne were fought. Sir Archibald Murray succeeded Sir John Wolfe Murray as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Lord Derby assumed control of recruiting in Great Britain. Early in November the first meeting of the newly constituted War Committee of the Cabinet took place.

December was a momentous month. On the 3rd General Joffre became Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies with General Castlenau as his Chief of Staff; a few days later the siege of Kut began; the evacuation of Gallipoli was ordered; and not only ordered but carried out.

On December 15, Sir John French resigned his high post as Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France and was succeeded by Sir Douglas Haig. On the 22nd Sir William Robertson vacated the position of Chief of the Staff in France to take up the post of Chief of the Imperial General Staff at home in succession to Sir Archibald Murray. General Kiggell (Lieutenant-General Sir Lancelot E. Kiggell, K.C.B.) succeeded General Robertson as Chief of Staff in France, an appointment held for more than two years.

Taken together, all these momentous events pointed to one thing. At last we were beginning to realise the burning necessity for unity of command. This need found expression in the political sphere in the approval of the draft rules for an Inter-Allied Council of War. The

lesson was to be humiliating, tragically expensive, and unnecessarily slow; but it had to be learned.

These events of supreme importance made it clear to the country that we had yet a long way to go before victory could be sighted: the murder of Nurse Cavell in Brussels in October had the effect of hardening the national will to victory, and outraging the conscience of the civilised world.

CHAPTER III

1916

The General Outlook in the Near East—General Long's retirement—General Crofton Atkins appointed Director of Supplies and Transport—Quartering difficulties at home increase—Growth of Ordnance demands from France—The Q.M.G. gets value for expenditure—Anti-frostbite ointment manufactured and sent out within forty-eight hours—Manifold demands for equipment—"Ships and shoes and sealing-wax"—Four hundred railway wagons of equipment daily—"George Robey's Army"—War Office acquire Australian wool clips—Lord Rothermere appointed Director of Army Clothing Department—Shortage of tonnage—Cotton Textile Office established—Spending millions daily—Government and the manufacturers—Salving and repairing equipment—Difficulty of obtaining recruits for Ordnance Corps—Mechanical Transport, its growth and importance—Petrol stocks—Mechanical Depots at Kempton Park and elsewhere—Motor Transport in the East—The Women's Legion motor drivers—Lady Londonderry's pig farm—Her untiring efforts—Field-Marshal red tape conquers—The general military situation—Death of Lord Kitchener—His Majesty's Special Army Order—Verdun—Italy—Russia—Mr. Lloyd George becomes Secretary of State for War—Munitions—Effect of Lord Kitchener's death on Cowans—The Cornwallis-West case—General Battersby's criticism of Cowans—Lord Ivor Spencer Churchill quoted—State of the Indian Army—The Mesopotamian failure—Q.M.G. assumes responsibility for supplies—Mr. Asquith resigns and Mr. Lloyd George becomes Prime Minister—Lord Derby becomes War Minister—Ministries of Food, Pensions and Shipping established—Cowans's view of Mr. Asquith—He forms the opinion that there is a plot to filch the Quartermaster-Generalship from the Army—Determines to resist it—The end of an unlucky year.

THE early days of 1916 saw the first attempt to relieve the Kut Garrison. The successful evacuation of Gallipoli

on January 8, one of the truly marvellous pieces of Staff Work of the War, caused the whole Empire to breathe a sigh of profound relief, and was a source of particular gratification to the Q.M.G., who had from the first foreseen and pointed out insuperable difficulties in the Dardanelles scheme. He had always opposed and emphasised the objections to increasing our commitments in the Near East and to embarking on the Salonika adventure.

In the middle of January Sir Percy Lake assumed the appointment of Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia and General Smith-Dorrien (General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, G.C.B.) resigned command of the British Forces in East Africa.

In March the War Office had suffered a distinct loss in being deprived by his resignation of the brilliant services of General Long who had been Director of Supplies and Quartering from 1913 and Director of Supplies and Transport when these two most important posts were combined under one officer in 1914. Fortunately there was available to succeed him General Crofton Atkins. The services of these two officers covered the whole period of the War. No praise would be too high for their work, and Cowans took occasion after the Armistice publicly to express his admiration for General Atkins and make plain how much the country owed to him.

As time went on, the Q.M.G.'s difficulties in providing accommodation for the troops at home increased rather than diminished.

"During 1916," he wrote, "the influx of very large reinforcements of Australians and New Zealanders, in addition to Canadians, gave a specially anxious turn to the problem of quartering, owing to the fact that it was impossible to forecast the numbers arriving, and well-nigh impossible to keep accommodation available for even the numbers computed, whereas the actual numbers arriving were often greatly in excess.

"Considerable difficulty arose owing to the numbers of fresh troops requiring accommodation. In the first place, owing to the great scarcity of timber, building new huts

was so restricted as to be practically negligible, and so many of the larger buildings, schools and hotels had already been taken (not only by the War Office, but by other Government Departments) as to make it undesirable to take more over. On the other hand, the demand for accommodation increased continually. The very large expansion of the Royal Air Force and Tank Corps, and the formation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps among our own troops, occasioned large demands, while accommodation had also to be found for foreign troops passing through or being trained in this country, among which may be mentioned Portuguese Artillery, Forestry Corps, United States of America troops, Jewish Battalions, escaped Russians and prisoners of war awaiting repatriation. Further temporary accommodation was provided for men of the Royal Navy, and also for a large rest camp in connection with the extended scheme for men on leave from France, which, together with accommodation for prisoners of war, and for men and women employed on agricultural and road schemes, formed a serious addition to the problems which had to be faced."

The increasing demand for equipment was met right up to the end of the War, the great Midland trade which supplied the Army with its sheet metal articles and its cutlery being stimulated to previously undreamt of efforts towards production. In 1918 alone, in order that the soldier might be able to eat his dinner, they produced between them some twenty million mess tins, knives, forks and spoons, nearly four million water-bottles that he might not go thirsty, and four million razors that he might have no excuse for not appearing properly shaved on parade ; for his defence the steel industry supplied five million entrenching tools alone, while the Army Contracts Department bought enough barbed wire to make an effective entanglement round the equator.

All this was only effected by the closest co-operation between the Contracts Department and the manufacturer and producer. It has been said of Cowans that his achievement was not so wonderful when he had almost inexhaustible resources behind him ; that, given the money

to spend, anyone could buy. There was never greater fallacy. Anyone can spend, it is true, but not everyone can spend wisely. With money anyone can buy indeed, but not everyone can buy to the best advantage or obtain the best value for the money. Moreover, although it was always possible for Cowans to find more money, yet even money could not procure what did not exist, and it was here that the greatest part of his achievement lay—he cut out the middleman who in the days of the South African War had reaped so rich a harvest; indeed, by his initiative in organising the country's resources and appointing technical officers to stimulate production in the provinces, it came about that there were supplies for the Government's money to buy.

In this way, indeed, the Quartermaster-General became not, as he had been previously, a mere buyer in the market, but the organising genius behind the production of the country, with his finger on the pulse of every industry and trade. He made the Government a partner, instead of a customer, with a direct interest in the output of every firm working for the needs of the troops; a partner who often had to supply the material, assist with its manufacture and, when once made, arrange for its marketing. Others may claim the credit for this and others may deserve credit, but it is not too much to say that it was mainly due to Cowans's administrative and organising powers, his quick grip of essentials and his utter fearlessness in assuming responsibility, that the Government and the Trade of Great Britain stood shoulder to shoulder throughout the War.

As history shows, all successful men, especially great soldiers, have paid attention to details. Cowans was no exception. Indeed the office of Q.M.G. entails, perhaps more than any other military office, the care of little things. Cowans was concerned the whole War through with momentous questions of supply, but there is no better example of how he could throw his whole energy into obtaining, by his own personal influence and "drive," the seemingly small things, especially when they concerned the welfare and comfort of the troops, than the

following story. In the winter of 1914 trench warfare began, and with it came the menace of frostbite. It was a danger which had been overlooked, and when it became apparent it demanded immediate preventative action. One Monday evening, sitting in his office in Whitehall, Cowans received an urgent requisition for some form of anti-frostbite ointment for the use of the troops in the trenches. He wasted no time, and by the following morning he had collected in his office his technical advisors and the chief tallow merchants of London. Formulas were discussed, orders given, arrangements drawn up, and by the Thursday evening thousands of tins of the new ointment were on their way to France.

Cowans seems always to have risen to the occasion when extraordinary demands were made upon him, and these were many. One of the initial difficulties of securing the vast quantities of equipment necessary for the Army was the fact that so many of the items required were not produced for civilian consumption in the ordinary way. For example, it was easier to obtain supplies of clasp knives than it was to obtain water-bottles, since there were, even at the outbreak of the War, many firms manufacturing the one, and comparatively few the other.

But even water-bottles and other similar articles required for the soldier, for which there was no great civilian demand, were needs which it was possible to foresee would be required on a large scale early in the War. There were, however, other needs which no one could have anticipated until the moment came for them to be required in enormous quantities. As the campaign developed, for example, some 100,000 Yukon packs, a device for carrying ammunition on men's backs, were provided. Millions of yards of Hessian canvas and hundreds of tons of paint, cordage and iron were demanded for camouflage purposes.

The "side-shows" also taxed the ingenuity of the Q.M.G.'s Department, each in a different way: for the Expeditionary Forces in the Mediterranean mosquito netting and sun helmets were needed; at one period so

urgent were the demands for these helmets that many factories were unable to produce the increased output required, but women in a factory at St. Albans worked on a night shift for six weeks, so that not only were all requirements met, but a reserve of half a million helmets was built up. Then for the British Division in Italy ice-axes, ice-creepers, alpenstocks and snow-shoes were essential; for the expedition to the Murman coast Arctic clothing, skis, snow-shoes and sledges. Photographic equipment had to be found for the Royal Air Force, millions of plates and sheets of paper, and for kinematographic instruction purposes an annual supply of film sufficient to stretch from Liverpool to New York. Wireless apparatus had to be found; kites and balloons; anti-gas equipment; carrier-pigeons and dogs, while each new nationality that entered the arena had its own special needs, as, for instance, the Chinese, the Indians and the Portuguese.

All these stores were produced, and much else besides; new industries were created and old ones expanded, the production for the Army being in many cases increased a thousand-fold. For example, the flannelette used for cleaning rifles would have stretched from London to Sydney and back. Cowans was despatching daily an average of four hundred railway wagons—from depots in the United Kingdom to overseas theatres of operations.

§ 2

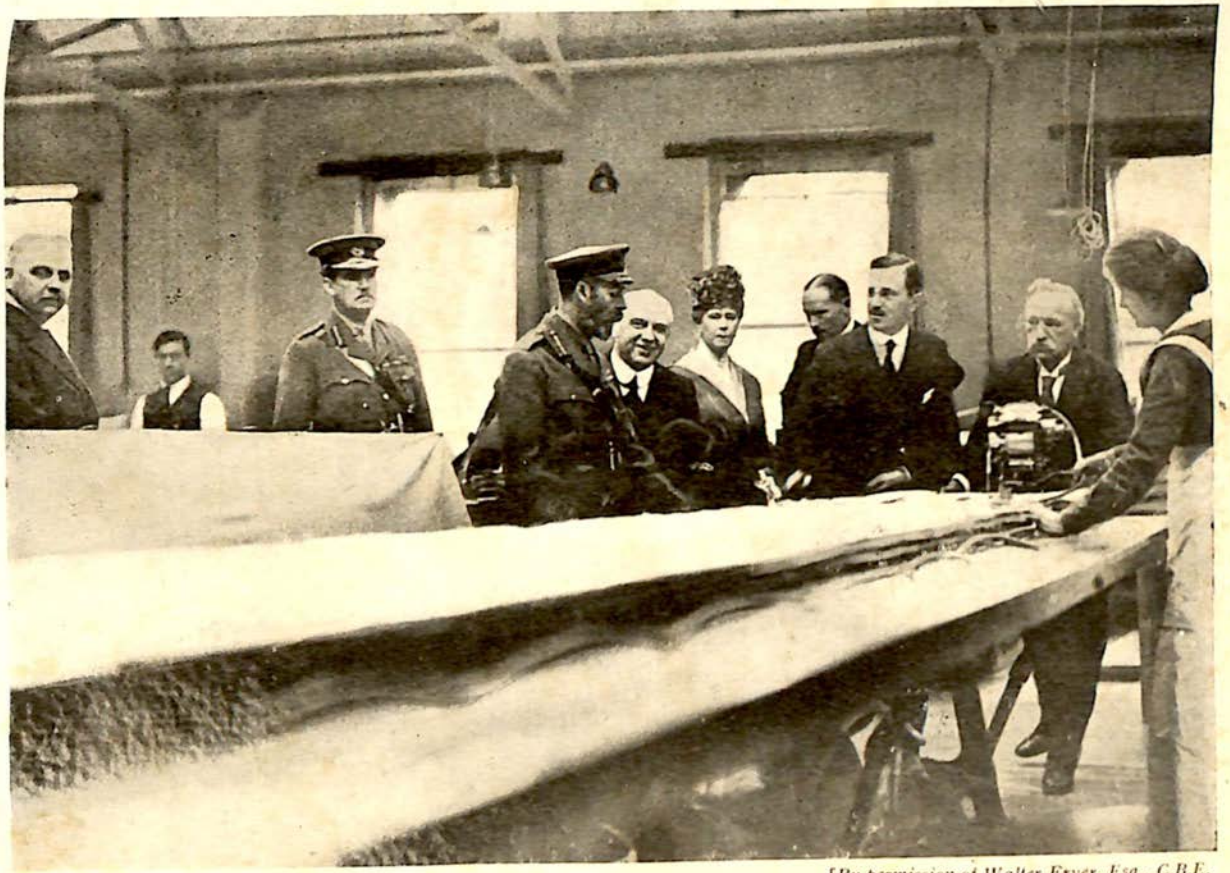
The enormous demands of the New Armies, combined with the necessity of maintaining replacements for the Expeditionary Force, had made it impossible for the Quartermaster-General's Department to undertake to clothe the Territorial Force on the outbreak of hostilities, as had been proposed originally by the peace time regulations, since the £200,000 that such a scheme would have entailed was not available from the Army Estimates. Territorial Force Associations were therefore called upon to carry out this work for the units under their peace administration; a task which, as Cowans said, "they

performed on the whole with success," adding that although this course inevitably put many purchasing and competing bodies in the field, all of whom were trying to obtain articles of the same description, it nevertheless extended the possibilities and sources of supply.

The Volunteers, who had been enrolled at the beginning of the War, but not organised as a County Force until 1915, had clothing issued to efficients in January, 1917, and to all enrolled men in April, 1918, a reserve of clothing being found for each Battalion. Previous to this all Volunteers had worn, when drilling, red bands with G.R. on their arms, which led Mr. George Robey, who did so much for the welfare of the troops in general during the War, to remark, " Whenever I go to Hampstead Heath I can't make out why I see so many men about with my initials on their arms."

Cowans, working on the principle he himself introduced at the War Office of reducing expenditure by eliminating the middle man as far as possible, arranged for the Army Contracts Department to buy the whole of the British wool clip direct from the farmers. The public spirit of the Australian and New Zealand Governments in placing at the disposal of the British Government all its products has already been mentioned, and by this means it was possible to acquire the whole of the Australian wool which was not required for the home mills. This arrangement lasted for the period of the War and for one year thereafter. The Government of India agreed to allow its wool to be exported to Great Britain, and this was disposed of at fixed prices against rationing certificates. The Army Contracts Department had all " tops " combed and arranged for the scouring and blending of wool on commission.

The whole question of raw materials for clothing and equipment had been so complex and difficult that further developments were inevitable. The obtaining of supplies and co-ordinating of military and civilian demands was obviously outside the proper functions of the Q.M.G.; Lord Rothermere (the Viscount Rothermere of Hempstead) was therefore appointed Director-General of the



[*By permission of Walter Fryer, Esq., C.B.E.*

Their Majesties King George V. and Queen Mary inspecting an Army Clothing Factory. J. S. C. is standing behind His Majesty.

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Royal Army Clothing Department. Having first assured himself that the foundations were already well and truly laid, Lord Rothermere proceeded to develop an enormous undertaking, the importance and success of which it would be difficult to over-estimate.

In 1917 the shortage of tonnage made it necessary to establish a system of rationing whereby any wool surplus to the requirements of the military and naval Allied contracts could be distributed proportionately for civilian purposes. Similar action had to be taken in the case of other raw materials; at times shipping difficulties made it hard to meet even the demands made by the military contracts, but for the most part the Department was able to arrange for a certain amount to be left in the civilian market, to enable manufacturers to keep together their business connections.

In this way it was found possible to clothe sixty-nine Divisions for service with the various Expeditionary Forces, in addition to the requirements of the home troops and Divisions which were sent to India, and troops which replaced regular units on garrison duty abroad.

In those days Cowans was a man who dealt in millions. He spent in millions; he provided in millions. Between the outbreak of War until March, 1919, when he left the War Office, he had provided for the troops, among other articles of clothing, no less than thirty million uniforms, twenty million cardigans, twenty-three million caps, eight million great coats, fifty-seven million shirts and one hundred and thirty-six million pairs of socks. The total provision involved the purchase of nearly four hundred million yards of cloth, serge and flannel and other material from which the garments were manufactured; the total expenditure on clothing alone amounting to some £300,000,000, nearly one hundred times what the normal peace time expenditure for the same period would have been.

All the clothing issued to the troops was of good hard wearing material; it had to withstand the maximum of wear and tear, and Cowans recognised from the outset that nothing but the best would do.

This was particularly so with the boots. Next to his rifle, boots are, for the infantry soldier, by far the most important part of his outfit, certainly the most important part of his clothing. It would be interesting to make a list of the battles of history that have been won or lost through boots, and it is an undeniable fact that the boot supply in previous campaigns had been far from satisfactory.

The boots supplied in the European War were, however, always of the best. In peace time the yearly boot supply, some quarter of a million pairs, was produced by about twenty-five firms in Northamptonshire. Throughout the War this county remained the chief source of supply, but it became impossible for the Northamptonshire firms to cope with the whole of the increased demands, and orders were also placed with manufacturers in Leicester, Bristol and Leeds, as well as those in Scotland and Ireland, so that it was possible for the Q.M.G. to procure the forty-seven million pairs he required between August, 1914, and March, 1919, apart from orders placed for the Allied Governments.

"This result," wrote Cowans, "was only achieved by enlisting the aid of a civilian expert, to whom was entrusted the task of organising the whole of the resources of the country, and of inducing fresh manufacturers to turn out boots of the Regulation Army pattern."

In this way, by constant supervision, by the strictest economy and by utilising every possible means of supply, Cowans was able to maintain an adequate provision of boots for the Army throughout the War. He was not content, however, to be in a position merely to maintain supplies, but was always aiming at amassing great reserve stocks to meet any unforeseen emergencies. It was well that he did so, since it enabled the Army Council to give the assistance it did in supplying boots for the American Army and in equipping the Russian forces. Owing to these outside demands, his reserves became greatly depleted, and when the British troops had been refitted after the Armistice his stocks had become lower than they had been at any period of the War.

Besides the cares which the supply of ordinary articles of clothing involved, Cowans had many other preoccupations as he himself stated:

"In addition to the provision of normal clothing and stores for the Expeditionary Force, special requirements had to be met, such as fur and other winter garments, footgear and warm clothing for the trenches, none of which had been anticipated or provided for until practically the moment for their use had arrived. All these additional requirements involved the handling of enormous quantities of goods of a very varied description; for example, 3,000,000 goat and other skins, and many million square feet of sheepskin leather, had to be obtained for the manufacture of fur and leather under-coats, and large numbers of long fur-lined coats were obtained from Canada and the United States. Large issues were also made from stocks to the Serbians and other Allied Governments, and to India.

"During the War we had to assist in clothing the troops in the Australian, New Zealand and Portuguese Forces, and were called upon to supply both clothing and equipment to the United States Army. Many items of their clothing differed from British patterns, necessitating new and varied provision. The introduction of labour companies from China, of Kaffir boys from the Cape, and of other South African natives, as well as Indians and Egyptians, furnished a still more varied field for which clothing had to be found."

The storage required for these vast stocks was, of course, immense, for the accommodation existing on the outbreak of War was limited. Cowans secured large premises such as the White City, Olympia, the Great Central Goods Depot and Commercial Buildings, Aldgate. Other suitable buildings were acquired at the great provincial centres such as Manchester, York and Southampton. Buildings were erected at Battersea, and a clothing depot was also opened at Leeds, with sub-depots at Sheffield, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and storehouse accommodation at Bradford, Shipley, Huddersfield, Manchester and elsewhere.

The duties of storage, issue and maintenance of army clothing are undertaken by the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, which is also responsible for all war material other than food, forage and medical stores. Besides being responsible for the actual care and issue of stores, its activities were also utilised for repairs, and in this way were instrumental in saving the country many millions of pounds and made possible economies in material at a time of world shortage.

"One of the most outstanding developments of the Army Ordnance Department," wrote Cowans "was the reclamation and repair of equipment of all kinds, and clothing which had been rendered temporarily defective and unserviceable. . . .

"Large organisations were built up at the Bases and in back areas in every theatre of War where very large quantities of material, which would otherwise have had to be replaced by new supplies from England, were cleaned, repaired and rendered fit for re-issue. Some idea of the magnitude of these operations may be gained from the fact that at one of such organisations alone over four and a half million items, including over a million blankets and five hundred thousand greatcoats and leather jerkins, were cleaned and repaired during the period of six months up to June 30, 1918, while at another, between twenty-five thousand and thirty thousand pairs of boots were repaired weekly."

There was naturally a large expansion in the personnel of the Corps during the War, and the peace time establishment of two hundred and forty-eight officers and two thousand two hundred and seventy-three other ranks was increased to two thousand two hundred and fifty-three officers and thirty-eight thousand one hundred and ninety-three other ranks. A similar expansion was necessary in the case of the civilian employees, who, in August, 1914, numbered some five thousand. This number increased to nearly thirty-three thousand men and women, of whom over nine thousand were employed in the Royal Army Clothing Department and Factory, the remainder at the various Ordnance Depots in the United

Kingdom, while in addition over fifteen thousand were employed in the various theatres of war.

The difficulties of obtaining suitable men for the Ordnance Corps were even greater than those experienced in other branches of the Service, since for many of the duties special qualifications and technical knowledge were required, particularly in the armourer and armament artificer sections. Cowans summarised these difficulties in the following words:

"Immediately after the outbreak of War steps were taken to procure and train officers and men for the more technical branches, while the other branches were augmented by the appointment of officers from the retired lists of both the Army and Indian Ordnance Department, and of civilians whose previous professional or commercial experience was considered likely to fit them for the duties in which they were to be trained. It must, however, be remembered that, with the exception of the retired officers, the new Staff was wholly inexperienced in the duties of the Department. Inspectors of ordnance machinery, armourer-sergeants and armaments artificers being skilled grades for which special technical qualifications are necessary, were especially difficult to obtain."

The difficulties of the Corps did not end, however, with training, but rather increased as the War went on, for large numbers of its male employees, both military and civilian, were continually being surrendered: clerks and storemen were combed out and men of category A. under the rank of sergeant transferred to the fighting line; while all the civilian workers eligible for military service were released unless, after very careful scrutiny, adjudged indispensable. The losses in personnel thus sustained were made up by the transfer of men of lower medical categories and also in many instances by the employment of women, so that in time the male personnel of the Corps became almost entirely composed of men unfit for service in the front line. In spite of this fact, the Corps as a whole rendered the most efficient service throughout the War and, as a recognition of its "splendid work," His Majesty the King conferred the

distinction of "Royal" upon it at the conclusion of hostilities.

§ 3

In the summer of 1916 the demand for mechanical transport overseas became heavier than ever before. It has been shown that the original output of vehicles was about ninety a week. By July, 1915, this had been increased to 250 a week, and by October the production had so increased it was possible for the Quartermaster-General to agree to release vehicles to Government contractors to assist them in their work and also in some measure to relieve the almost intolerable strain on the railways. By the end of 1915 about a thousand vehicles had been released, but only on the condition that they could be called up again when required.

The wisdom of keeping this valuable reserve in hand became apparent when the pinch began to be felt in 1916, and orders were given for four hundred to be impressed. "More were required," wrote Cowans, "and could have been withdrawn, but it was realised that too large a withdrawal would interfere with the production of munitions."

In addition to the output of the British manufacturers, contracts were placed in America for large numbers of vehicles. According to the Quartermaster-General's report, "in 1916, for financial reasons, pressure was brought to bear to cancel the American contracts. The inadvisability thereof was pointed out, but the advantages were considered to outweigh the disadvantages, and for the time being the American contracts were cancelled."

Later in the year, however, it was found necessary to reopen these contracts to the extent of some seventy lorries a week. It was, too, impossible to cancel the American contracts for the Holt Caterpillar tractors and four-wheeled-drive, which pulled the big guns, since similar machines were not produced in the United Kingdom, and although an attempt was made in 1916 to manufacture them at home, the numbers produced were

small, and the fact that the parts were not interchangeable prevented their being taken up by the War Office.

"As time went on," wrote Cowans, "it was found that others were cutting into the field of mechanical transport production, owing to the increased requirements for aero engines, tanks, etc., and overlapping was found to be taking place between the Mechanical Transport Directorate and the Ministry of Munitions. The result was that the whole of the provision of mechanical transport vehicles was handed over to the Ministry.

"The War Office continued to be responsible for the allocation of the mechanical transports of the Army, Air Force and all other Government departments, the Ministry of Munitions being responsible for the provision on periodical bulk demands forwarded to them by the War Office. This procedure continued throughout, but at no time did supply meet demand."

Naturally the demands for petrol increased with the unprecedented output of vehicles for the Mechanical Transport Section, rising from two hundred and fifty thousand gallons a month in the early days of the War to ten and a half million gallons—more than forty times as much—in France alone during the latter stages of the War.

Until the middle of 1916 all the petrol required for the troops overseas was filled in England, Portishead, near Bristol, being the principal centre. But by that time consumption had risen to two million gallons a month and it became imperative to come to some arrangements whereby the strain upon the landing facilities at the Base Ports would be eased and freight and labour saved at the same time. Consequently tank storage was taken up at Rouen and Calais, filling installations, together with tin and case manufacturing plant, were transferred from Portishead, and arrangements were made for a direct service of tank steamers from the United States to France. The filling installations were constructed in sections, so that they could be expanded to meet the demands of increasing consumption.

It was soon found, however, that the tank storage

available at Calais (about eight thousand tons) was inadequate. "By agreeing to supply all the local French requirements (civil and military)," wrote Cowans, "and the Belgian Army, based at Calais, we were able to obtain the use of an additional ten thousand tons of tank storage. This addition was out of all proportion greater than the increased liabilities incurred, and therefore enabled the Ministry of Shipping to arrange for the maintenance of regular supplies in large tank vessels."

These arrangements made it possible after the autumn of 1916 almost to discontinue shipments of Mechanical Transport petrol from England, except at times of emergency when unexpected increases in consumption made it necessary to replenish reserve stocks.

The aviation spirit, however, which required special supervision, continued to be filled at Portishead until, in 1918, the consumption had increased to such an extent that it was also found necessary that the aviation petrol should be filled and distributed in France. The Calais and Rouen installations were able to undertake this, and in addition supplied both the Mechanical Transport and aviation petrol for Italy.

The formation of the Independent Air Force, each machine of which carried three hundred gallons of petrol, made necessary special distribution arrangements which were both technical and complicated. In this matter the Shell Marketing Company acted as agents of the War Office and set up inland tank storage, both at the aerodromes and at the nearest points on the railway. Cowans records that "the War Department received valuable advice and assistance from Mr. Waley Cohen (Sir Robert Waley Cohen, K.B.E.), the Managing Director of the Asiatic Petroleum Company, and the engineers of this firm. Mr. Waley Cohen was appointed, in 1917, Petroleum Advisor to the War Office."

For the first three years of the War all the petrol required for the forces at home and in France was obtained by means of contracts with British firms. In the autumn of 1917, however, the Government assumed control of all petrol imports, and supplies were subsequently bought

and shipped under arrangements made between the War Office, the Ministry of Shipping and the American Purchasing Board.

In place of the "contract supply," arrangements were then made with the principal companies in the United Kingdom for the provision and distribution of petrol as required, and supplies were obtained in exchange for a special form of voucher from any of the contractors' agencies.

"Under this system," wrote Cowans, "it was not necessary for the War Department to hold any material stocks of petrol inland, because in all towns of any importance agencies existed at which reasonable supplies could always be relied upon. This method of supply proved both an economical and elastic one for meeting the varying home requirements throughout the War."

Petrol for Egypt and Salonika was obtained under contract with the Asiatic Petroleum Company and was shipped from the East, and canned at Suez, at the rate of some two million gallons a month. This Company also supplied requirements in East Africa, while Mesopotamia was provided for by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

The accommodation of the ever-increasing number of vehicles proved a difficult problem throughout the War, both as regards their reception and repair and the storage of spare parts.

It has been mentioned that the original Reception Depot was at Aldershot. When the accommodation there became insufficient the depot was moved to the London General Omnibus Garage at Camberwell. This in turn became too small, so that vehicles had to be parked on public highways, a procedure which, as Cowans observes, was unsuitable for many reasons. It was then, in the summer of 1916, decided to take over Kempton Park race-course, which, of all the many sites inspected, was considered to fulfil the greatest number of conditions that were required. To begin with, it was close to London. This was essential, in order to save time and petrol in despatching vehicles to and from the body builders. Then it was near the personnel reception depot, which

was situated at Grove Park. Furthermore, it was close to a main railway line and a main road and was enclosed in a ring fence, which meant that the number of men for guard purposes could be reduced to a minimum. It had not the covered accommodation required, but that, it was ascertained, could not be procured anywhere, and this was subsequently provided for as many vehicles as possible, so far as labour and material was available.

" This choice was justified," wrote Cowans, " and the depot worked successfully throughout."

Originally the Mechanical Transport spare part organisation had also been at Aldershot, but before long this accommodation, too, became insufficient and the stores were transferred to Short's Gardens, London. There the organisation increased until, as Cowans said, it became " the largest stores of its kind in the world," with six sub-depots and headquarters in the Holborn Restaurant, issuing not only the stores required by the Army, but also those required by the Royal Air Force and all Government Departments.

" The outstanding feature of the Mechanical Transport in Eastern theatres," wrote Cowans, " was the way that it was worked successfully under conditions which were thought impossible in pre-War days. The absence of roads, long distances travelled, and climatic conditions generally, made the successful employment of Mechanical Transport a very difficult problem. However, these difficulties were overcome, and much valuable experience was gained in the working of self-propelled vehicles in tropical and undeveloped countries.

" Mechanical transport was used in many ways other than in the supply of food and ammunition and the haulage of guns. Lorries were adapted to work on rails, Ford cars were used as light armoured cars, and in various other ways mechanical transport contributed greatly to the success of the operations."

In his despatch dated December 15, 1917, Lord Haig also wrote a high tribute to the work of the Mechanical Transport Service : " In spite of all difficulties the Army Service Corps has never failed to meet the needs of our

troops in food, ammunition, material and stores of all kinds. Particularly good work has been done by the Motor Transport drivers, who have shown the greatest gallantry and determination in getting forward the requisites for the Army under heavy shell fire and during long hours of exposure."

'In none of the "side-shows" to which Cowans refers was motor transport put to so hard a test as in the Palestine campaign, particularly during the advance where long distances had to be covered over some of the most difficult country that a lorry could encounter.

Captain P. H. Stanley-Adams, who was in command of 905 Mechanical Transport Company during these operations, writes:

"Owing to the difficult nature of the country, two or three main dumps were established at the Base; from there relays of transport supplied smaller dumps along the line. Mechanical Transport Columns were usually split up into convoys of fifteen or twenty, each lorry taking on an average a load of four and a half tons. These convoys conveyed the supplies from smaller dumps to points as near as possible to the Line Headquarters, and from there the Horse Transport picked up the rations for their respective units.

"Owing to the rapid advance convoys had to travel as far as sixty miles to the Base Dumps for supplies. Moreover, it must be realised that until we reached Latron (fifteen miles from Jerusalem) there were no such things as roads, and the convoys had to follow native tracks as far as possible.

"During the wet weather conditions became increasingly difficult. In the desert we constantly came across *wadi*, which had to be negotiated in the following manner, the bridges being unsafe for heavy traffic. First one vehicle was got up the far side by any means possible, such as the use of planks. This often entailed the loss of an hour or more, but, once it had been accomplished, this lorry was utilised in pulling up the next, which, in its turn, helped the one behind it, the gradient on each side of the *wadi* being in some cases very steep.

"Transport of supplies on the right flank of our line was, in the main, more difficult; this was during the attempt to outflank the Turks round Beersheba. The going was very rough and large wastes of sand had to be traversed. It was during these operations that there occurred the only instance I know when the food-supply column broke down. A certain convoy, detailed to carry water (200-gallon tanks were fixed on the lorries) for the Australian troops, failed to keep up with them, with the result, I believe, that the column were ninety-eight hours without water, both men and beasts. This was due entirely to the fact that the vehicles got stuck in the sand and each one in turn had to be dug out.

"Some parts of the desert had wire roads laid, two rows of ordinary two-foot mesh wire netting being pegged down, and this formed a perfect service for troops to march on; it also greatly assisted the lighter vehicles, but was not suitable for the heavy type, being inclined to buckle.

"The means of finding food dumps was another added difficulty, there being no towns or villages and no sign-post to go by. The difficulty was sometimes overcome by utilising the Egyptian Labour Corps to heap up mounds of sand to mark the track. This worked admirably on the outward journey, but, as often as not, before the return journey a strong wind had sprung up and one found one's mounds had completely vanished, and consequently had great difficulty in finding the way home. Many times I have been completely lost in the desert.

"The average distance for food supply columns in Palestine was thirty to forty miles a day. The hill gradients around Jerusalem were very severe and placed a great strain on the Mechanical Transport. Going out from Jerusalem towards the Dead Sea they had to drop down suddenly, no less than a thousand feet, on to the plains of Jericho.

"This naturally exacted a very heavy toll on the transport, so much so that about half-way through the advance we had no less than seventy-five per cent of our

vehicles out of action, and we were unable to get spare parts for our machines owing to ships bringing these being torpedoed on the way out. In fact, the position had become so serious that General Allenby had decided on a retirement unless the transport could be got going again. Fortunately a ship of spares arrived in time to allow the advance to continue."

In 1917 the Mechanical Transport Board was formed, consisting of four military members and four civilians, with the Quartermaster-General as chairman. Cowans states that it met frequently and that "its counsels on matters of policy were invaluable," and sub-committees, with a member of the Board as chairman, were formed to deal respectively with technical matters, lands and buildings, and general administration. He continues:

"The tendency to substitute motor transport for horse transport has been more and more marked throughout the period under review, and experiments in the transportation of field-guns and machine-gun battalions by motor transport have been made. This change was about to take place just prior to the signing of the Armistice, but it was ultimately decided to proceed no further with this alteration.

"Just prior to the Armistice the question of provision of a large number of cross-country tractors for use in the special operations in the spring of 1919 was under consideration. For some time prior to this the Motor Transport Experimental Section had produced various types of tractors, and comparative tests were about to be carried out between these and tractors of a similar nature built in America. Owing to the cessation of hostilities it was decided not to proceed further with this project."

Early in 1916 the Motor Drivers' Section of the Women's Legion came into being. The original idea was to form an ambulance corps to work in France in co-operation with the Red Cross, but so far there had been no lack of volunteer workers for this branch. On the other hand, public attention had been drawn to the large and increasing number of soldiers driving staff cars and

light vans in this country, and there was a strong feeling that soldiers might be better employed elsewhere.

Lady Londonderry approached the War Office with an offer to form a corps of women drivers and thus release the men. They would be recruited, tested, and, if necessary, trained by the Women's Legion and drafted into the Army Service Corps to serve a short term of probation. The offer was accepted and the section accordingly developed upon these lines. Miss Christobel Ellis (Mrs. Hector Munro Ferguson, C.B.E.) was appointed Commandant, and by April twenty women were selected, on one month's probation, to drive for the Army Service Corps. On the completion of the probationary period, the women were required to sign an agreement to serve for a further twelve months or for the duration of the War, which ever period should be the longer.

The hours were long and the task strenuous for women not hitherto accustomed to working under orders, but they met the demands made upon them in a plucky and creditable manner. Although they did not draw the same rates of pay, allowances and billeting, the women did precisely the same work as the men. They had charge of similar cars, and equal responsibility, and worked the same number of hours.

The success of this new venture was no doubt largely due to the Commandant's own example and personality, as well as to her initiative. At all events the Officer Commanding 606 Motor Transport Company, Army Service Corps, to which these first women drivers were attached, expressed himself, at the end of the month's probation, satisfied as a whole with the result of the experiment. By June the Motor Section had received official recognition, and the conditions of service were clearly set out.

On Miss Ellis's recommendation the Legion drivers were then divided into four grades, namely, superintendents, head drivers, mechanic-drivers, and garage washers.

The women were paid direct by the Officer Commanding the Company to which they were attached, and received no Army allowances for food or accommodation. The Commandant further recommended that all drivers

should have a short probationary period in garage work only—a severe test of a woman's powers of endurance, involving as it often did being out in the yard practically all night in all weathers, preparing the cars for next day.

In addition to these four grades the Motor Section also provided workers in purely technical work, such as storekeepers, vulcanisers, instrument repairers, stretchers, and draughtswomen. Indeed, the section may claim the distinction of being not only the first organisation of women motor drivers in this country, but also the first organisation of women trained for the engineering trade of the Army.

In February, 1917, the problem of man power was becoming increasingly difficult, and the possibility of employing women in many more occupations was seriously considered as one of the solutions. Accordingly a conference was held at the War Office to examine the proposal in detail. For the first time it was realised that the Quartermaster-General already had an organised body of women serving in his various branches.

This conference was followed by many others, and eventually it was decided to form a branch under the Adjutant-General termed A.G.11, to assume control of a corps of women to be known as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, which would include the women drivers. Cowans protested. He maintained that Army Service Corps drivers in charge of Army Service Corps vehicles must remain Army Service Corps personnel. Once more he showed his keen appreciation of the work being done by women and of the difficulties that would arise in the case of dual control and of the importance of maintaining *esprit de corps*.

From its inception the section had grown apace. There were at this time over two thousand women in about one hundred and fifty companies, including those attached as Army Service Corps drivers to the Royal Flying Corps, the Australian and New Zealand Forces and to the Canadian Forestry Corps.

The suggestion that they should be transferred to another Corps and renounce the privileges accorded to

them by the Army Service Corps, including the wearing of the Army Service Corps badge, was received by the women with dismay. Moreover, they regarded their contract of service as sacred. Cowans won the day, and in November, 1917, the Secretary of State gave his sanction for the Women's Legion motor drivers to continue to serve as before for home service only. The section henceforth formed part of the Quartermaster-General's branch, Q.M.G.3 (C), with Lieutenant-Colonel H. Rose in control. A training-centre and depot was established at Teddington, forming part of the Army Service Corps school for men; and women motor cyclists were introduced as despatch-riders.

On the formation of the Royal Air Force, six hundred Women's Legion drivers were transferred to form the nucleus of the women's section of the new Force. The Women's Legion, therefore, continued its motor drivers under the command of Miss Ellis, and Lady Patricia Ramsay (Her Royal Highness the Princess Patricia of Connaught) consented to become the Patroness of the Corps.

On March 16, 1918, the Women's Legion motor drivers had the distinction of being inspected personally by the Queen in the grounds at Buckingham Palace. The Quartermaster-General was present. Lady Londonderry had the privilege of presenting the Officers of the Legion to Her Majesty.

There were one hundred and sixty dismounted women drivers and sixty-five on vehicles, representative of all Army Service Corps Companies throughout the United Kingdom. Specimen cars were drawn up in front of the garden entrance of the Palace, including an ambulance, a staff car, a touring-car, a despatch-rider's cycle, and a box-body van. The Queen was much interested, and spoke to the superintendents of each squad, enquiring into the particulars of their work. Her Majesty complimented the Commandant, Miss Ellis, on the women's smart appearance and on the valuable work that they were doing.

Immediately after the Armistice recruiting was suspended for a time, but to their great satisfaction the

Quartermaster-General still had work for the Women's Legion drivers. It became desirable to speed up the demobilisation of men Motor Transport drivers in France, and in order to assist in meeting the heavy demands made upon transport, the Women's Legion was requested to send out several hundred drivers to the Army of Occupation. Among the most treasured possessions of the Legion is the following letter, received from the Q.M.G. in February, 1919:

War Office,
London, S.W.1.
February 17, 1919.

I desire to place on record my appreciation of the splendid services rendered by all officials and members of the Women's Legion motor drivers during the War.

It is now nearly four years since your President, the Marchioness of Londonderry, first proposed that the services of women should be utilised in connection with the transport services. The numbers have steadily increased, and to-day you form an important, and for the present an indispensable, part of the military organisation at home. There have been times when it would have been almost impossible to carry on without your valued and ungrudging service. Knowing, as I do, what this has meant to the Army particularly and to the Nation generally, it is a great pleasure to me to be the one to express your country's appreciation.

I would take this opportunity of saying that in the state of transition from war to peace conditions your help is still urgently needed, and I appeal confidently for a continuance of your loyal service, trusting that only very urgent grounds will induce you to ask for your release at present.

J. S. COWANS, General,
Quartermaster-General to the Forces.

To all Officials and Members
of the Women's Legion Motor Drivers.

The members responded enthusiastically to this appeal and an excellent record of the work performed by the drivers in the devastated area was received from the Quartermaster-General to the Troops in France and Flanders.

In the knowledge that they were assisting in the work of reconstruction by releasing men qualified in mechanics and various other trades required at home, the drivers cheerfully endured many hardships—long hours and arduous. As the areas closed, and wherever regular service men became available to take their place, the Legion women were sent home and demobilised.

In the Peace Procession which took place in London on July 19, 1919, a detachment of one hundred and twenty Women's Legion drivers formed part of the Royal Army Service Corps contingent. They were led by Lady Londonderry, followed by the Chief Commandant, Miss Christobel Ellis; the Deputy Commandant, Miss Ward; and two members of their Staff, Miss Meadows and Mrs. Sofar Whitburn. The detachment formed up at the London centre of the Women's Legion motor drivers and joined the procession in Kensington Gardens. At the conclusion of the march, at Hyde Park Corner, the detachment was addressed by Lady Londonderry, and dismissed. The physique of the Legion was particularly noted, the rank and file averaging five foot eight inches in height. This day may be regarded as the apex of achievement for all Service women—when they marched through the streets of London to salute their Sovereign in the same procession with the men who, with their acknowledged assistance, had fought and won the War.

But when demobilisation was finally to take place, the *esprit de corps* and spirit of patriotism which had been fostered by the War were not to be wholly lost.

In 1919 a Reserve of the Women's Legion motor drivers was formed and serving members were invited to enrol. The congenial conditions under which they were now working was no doubt largely responsible for the very enthusiastic response. Over ninety per cent answered

the call, and large numbers of ex-Legion drivers and also members of the other Corps, requested permission to join. The usefulness and expediency of such a Reserve were tested during the Railway Strike in the autumn of that year, when the Women's Legion Reservists in the London District were mobilised for service in connection with the transport, collection and distribution of food supplies.

In 1921 a club-house was opened in St. George's Square for the benefit of the Women's Legion motor drivers, which has proved of the utmost benefit as a centre for keeping the members of the Corps in touch with one another and in providing a comfortable home for several of those whose work lies in London.

§ 4

Early in 1915 Lady Londonderry, in common with many others, had begun to be gravely concerned about the food shortage. She approached the Q.M.G. with a scheme which he, ever ready to accept outside help, warmly supported.

Her experience with the Women's Legion made her familiar with the hutted camps all over the country and she knew that in a great number of these it was impossible to find a use for the cookhouse waste. In all camps a proportion of it was sold locally as " swill " and used for feeding pigs, but the local demand was of course limited and labour and transport difficulties made selling at any great distance from the camps impossible.

At first, it is true, farmers and pig-breeders who had men and transport available sent considerable distances to fetch what was a cheap and valuable food, but the growing labour shortage had curtailed this practice as early as the beginning of 1915.

A little later there grew up a number of dealers who, acting as middlemen, collected the swill in the camps and transported it all round the country. This led to many abuses. A cart or van laden with barrels of swill passing

through the camps became so familiar a sight that no one paid any attention to them. Many, indeed most, of these itinerant dealers were dishonest and swill-dealing was only an excuse for obtaining access to the camp and more particularly to the cookhouses, storehouses, and canteen yards.

In the swill-tubs were often to be found hams, sides of bacon, fourteen-pound sealed tins of tea, pairs of boots and even sets of harness! This was a more profitable business than hawking swill.

Food was becoming scarce, prices were going up, and a clever dealer who got to know the fatigue men in the various camps and armed himself with a little cheap tobacco or whisky could make money. Commanding Officers were busy training; the sanitary authorities insisted on the camp refuse being cleared daily, and if obliging men came and took it away in barrels—why, it saved labour and time in sending it to the incinerator to be burned.

Eventually, owing to these abuses, all hawking in camps was forbidden and admission to the lines became exceedingly difficult.

At one time on Salisbury Plain petrol had to be used in considerable quantities for the purpose of burning camp refuse as there was not labour available to bury it and its existence was a menace to the health of the troops. Few people had any conception of the trouble, care and expense entailed in suddenly improvising sanitary services for a hundred thousand men in the wilds of Wiltshire and Dorsetshire.

Taking all the facts together, Lady Londonderry decided that one way to relieve the difficulty was to start pig farms in connection with all the large camps. This would not only augment the food supplies of the country —and even to some extent reduce transport required for imported food—but it would provide a means of disposing of the swill at a fair price, and the troops could have pork occasionally instead of the eternal bacon.

Very wisely, she had at first approached the Quarter-master-General and secured his support. Armed with this she decided that Salisbury Plain was by far the best

place for her experiment. She found everyone concerned —as the Army formula has it—more than courteous; she found a few mildly interested and one or two mad keen. It all seemed so simple. A few acres of waste land, a little labour, some prize stock from Lord Londonderry's famous piggeries, and there you were. What could the existence of a few piggeries tucked away in a snug fold of land on Salisbury Plain have to do with Generals and Brass-Hats, or how could it affect the activities of the General Staff so intent on training the New Armies? But it could, and, it appeared, it did. To this day there is probably in the archives at Salisbury a huge file several inches thick labelled "The Marchioness of Londonderry's Experimental Pig Farm." Alas! the pigs never materialised sufficiently to have a family, but the parent file was quite prolific and eventually produced several young files of quite presentable dimensions.

First of all land. Ah! that concerned the War Department Lands Branch, a mysterious and omnipotent body who dealt with all sorts of occult matters such as "encroachments" and so on, and whose tentacles, once having gripped anything, never relaxed into a decision and never let go. Still, Salisbury Plain is a vast space and nobody interested ever seriously thought there would be any difficulty about land.

Next there were the Royal Engineers. There is a hoary tradition in the Army that all Sappers are mad, but, if it were true, Lady Londonderry was quite capable of the supreme tactfulness of sending a lunatic to negotiate with lunatics.

Then there were such questions as transport of swill to the central pig farm, military labour, the price to be paid for the swill, the capital for running the experiment until it was on a paying basis, the sinking of a well, the erection of pig-styes, the provision of cooking facilities for the pig food, housing and messing accommodation for the staff, and a hundred and one other difficulties. Lady Londonderry was quite prepared to find, or induce her friends to find, the necessary capital: if military labour proved to be unavailable she would find female labour.

She had the Quartermaster-General behind her, the Director-General of the Army Medical Services (Surgeon-General Sir Alfred Keogh, G.C.V.O.), the President of the Board of Agriculture, Mr. Rowland Prothero (the Lord Ernle, M.V.O.), and the whole of the Southern Command. She was helping the troops, helping the country, inculcating economy, producing food, saving transport, assisting in keeping the camp hygienic; adding to the messing money of the troops by buying swill no one else would buy, and—all to no purpose.

What a cottager or a farmer could have arranged in a day or two, all these mighty forces could not accomplish in many months.

It is impossible to record the difficulties that were overcome, the susceptibilities that were smoothed, the interests that were composed, the prejudices that were removed, the miles and miles of red tape that were patiently swallowed before the idea of an Army Experimental Pig Farm was abandoned.

Between Bulford and Larkhill, within convenient reach of Sling, Parkhouse and Perham Down Camps, was found an irregular piece of land measuring some twenty acres. On it grew a few wind-twisted pine-trees—and not much else. This piece of land Lady Londonderry coveted, not because it was ideal, but because it was surrounded by good roads, was within reach of all the camps, yet far enough away to prevent any objections arising on hygienic or æsthetic grounds, and was not too hopelessly far from a railway station. Moreover, it was to some extent sheltered from the fierce winds that sweep over the Plain in winter—and pigs, to thrive, must be kept warm.

The Quartermaster-General had himself taken half a day from a hard-earned Sunday spent at Donhead with Sir James and Lady Pender in the summer of 1915 for the purpose of inspecting and approving of the site. All this, however, was of no avail. The scheme received its death-blow—and even Lady Londonderry's courage, patience and indefatigable activity quailed—from a War Office Minute that read something like this:

"The matter has received most careful consideration. It would, however, appear that as Salisbury Plain was purchased by Parliament from public funds for the purpose of Military Training it is not possible to authorise the utilisation of one part of it for a purpose that might interfere with the purposes for which it appears to have been designed by Parliament."

In War Office or Army Minutes things "appeared" as regularly as manifestations at a spiritualistic séance —as non-committal, and just as vague.

The classical instance is a minute authorising the burial of a soldier who was so tactless as to die at an inconvenient place and time; it stated, "that as Pte. 12786 Thomas Atkins appears to have died suddenly on the 18th inst., at Richby Hill, where it appears there is no military cemetery available, there appears to be no objection to interring him in the civilian cemetery, which appears to be available."

But to return to Lady Londonderry. The pertinacity that organised and the skill that directed the invaluable Women's Legion determined to have one more try.

The faithful few were privately consulted, and it was decided that if the law could not be broken it might at least be bent a little—of course for a good purpose only.

As far as could be discovered there was no regulation actually forbidding units which were favourably circumstanced for the purpose, keeping pig farms on their own. If there was, it was ignored because many did so. There was a flourishing farm at the Central Flying School at Upavon, and Colonel Sylvester Bradley, who was a master of organisation and a pioneer of economies of all kinds, had one at Sling. He was approached and consented to run an experimental farm on Lady Londonderry's behalf. Again the question of land defeated every effort.

It was then thought that if private land could be obtained and the experiment run by a civilian no objections could be made. Obviously no private land was available on the Plain. The experiment had no value,

was indeed impossible, if it were not made near a large camp. Many enquiries led to the conclusion that the neighbourhood of Fovant Camp was the only possible place.

Lord Pembroke (Major the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery) owned all the surrounding land, but, as he was abroad on active service, Lady Pembroke was approached. She made her influence felt and a suitable plot of land with some stone buildings on it was discovered. It was not too far from Fovant Camp and the buildings would not require much work to put them in order. But the idea was doomed from the first.

It finally broke down on the question of labour. Civilians were unavailable and the Military Authorities would not help, even by lending German prisoners. Thus Lady Londonderry's Experimental Pig Farm, like many other great ideas, began and ended its existence in the fat pages of many Army files.

Field-Marshal " Red Tape " proved omnipotent.

§ 5

At the end of March a most important and significant Inter-Allied Conference had assembled in Paris when a Declaration of Unity between Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia and Serbia regarding military, economic and diplomatic affairs was drawn up and signed. During the last week in May the Military Service Act became law, and affairs in Russia were so critical that it was decided Lord Kitchener should visit that country in the hope that by doing so we should not only gain full first-hand information about what was happening there, but that his great prestige would succeed in reviving enthusiasm amongst the Russian Armies and population.

On June 5, H.M.S. *Hampshire* was sunk by a mine off the Scottish coast and Lord Kitchener and all his Staff, including the ever faithful FitzGerald, were drowned. The blow shook the Empire to its soul and for the time everything looked black. The New Armies which he

THE MARCHIONESS OF LONDONDERRY.

(*From the portrait by Philip László, M.V.O., specially painted for the Imperial War Museum.*

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had made, every man and woman everywhere, felt that they had lost a personal friend—and not only a personal friend but a great soldier who was going to lead them to victory; and as was said by Mosley of William the Silent, "when he died the little children cried in the streets."

To the Army in general and to Cowans in particular the immediate consequences were incalculable. The Quartermaster-General had lost the friend, the Chief, and the tower of strength and support which he had enjoyed from the earliest days of the War. His Majesty fittingly voiced the grief of the Empire in the following special Army Order.

ARMY ORDER.

War Office,
June 6, 1916.

DEATH OF LORD KITCHENER.

MESSAGE FROM HIS MAJESTY THE KING TO THE TROOPS.

By His Majesty's Commands the following Order has been issued to the Army:

The King has learnt with profound regret of the disaster by which the Secretary of State for War has lost his life, while proceeding on a special mission to the Emperor of Russia.

Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener gave forty-five years of distinguished service to the State, and it is largely due to his administrative genius and unwearying energy that the country has been able to create and place in the field the Armies which are to-day upholding the traditional glories of our Empire.

Lord Kitchener will be mourned by the Army as a great soldier who, under conditions of unexampled difficulty, rendered supreme and devoted service both to the Army and the State.

By Command of the Army Council,
R. B. BRADE.

Added to all this Verdun was being stormed by the Germans; the (1916) Battles of the Somme had begun with the battle of Albert; military events in Italy were in an unsatisfactory state; and, as has been said, no one knew what might happen in Russia.

On July 7, Mr. Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, succeeded Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War. He came from the Munitions Ministry with great prestige, whether deserved or not need not concern us here. One thing must, however, be said. It was not till about the middle of 1916 that the artillery situation became anything like satisfactory. From 1914 to May, 1915, it had been the duty of the War Office to find all munitions, the responsibility being ably discharged by General Von Donop, the Master-General of the Ordnance (Major-General Sir Stanley B. Von Donop, K.C.B.). Large orders, or as large as the available sources of supply could cope with, were placed in 1914 and early in 1915, and it was these that were reaching France during the period in question. It has always been said that it takes a year to make a rifle, and certainly the provision of guns and shells by a largely-untrained army of munition workers did not take any less. It was not before 1917 that any of the munitions manufactured under the compelling power of Mr. Lloyd George's personality began to reach France. This point is often overlooked.

§ 6

The tragic death of Lord Kitchener besides causing Cowans great grief had many ill-consequences for him, and although what came to be known later as the Cornwallis-West case was not amongst the most important, it perhaps caused him the most annoyance. First of all it had been already considered and dismissed by his official superior, Lord Kitchener, the head of the British Army, who, as it happened, was also Secretary of State.

In the midst of his sense of the immense loss he personally, the Army, and the Empire had sustained, at a moment when matters were being taken in hand by a new Secretary of State, and at a time when the battle

areas around Verdun, in the Somme, on the Ancre and on the Isonzo were holding the breathless attention of a watching, suffering world, the powers that be engaged the time of Parliament passing special legislation, set up a secret Court of Enquiry and almost paralysed the activities of the Q.M.G. for the time being. Of such an act at such a time it is difficult to say whether it was utterly discreditable or merely wantonly foolish. It is dealt with here not for the purpose of raking up an old and foolish scandal, but because to ignore it would be misinterpreted and it is only right the story—for what it is worth—should be put in correct perspective.

It is quite impossible to exaggerate the effect of the whole thing on Cowans and on his work and, therefore, on the British Armies. Whatever excuse there may have been for Mr. Lloyd George the politician, there can be little for Mr. Lloyd George the Secretary of State for War, who should not only have backed a high officer who had rendered such great public service, but should have forbidden any action that would lessen his usefulness or impair the work of the Army. Not so. Other considerations conquered. If Cowans formed the opinion that he had no friend in the new Secretary of State, he appears to have been fully justified in doing so and, as will be seen, nothing that subsequently happened would tend to modify such a view.

It is only fair to say that Sir Arthur Markham, in taking up the case, did what seemed to him right. His motives were entirely praiseworthy, but his judgment was at fault and he might at least have taken the precaution of consulting beforehand with Colonel Cornwallis-West, whom he knew fairly intimately in the House of Commons. He was told of a case of oppression and in characteristic fashion rushed precipitately to the defence. The real blame, however, lay with those who, knowing all the facts, or being in a position to know, forced the matter to a conclusion, instead of resisting political pressure and disarming or satisfying imperfectly informed clamour.

The utmost that could be charged against Cowans was

that, in the innumerable preoccupations of the War, he wrote a letter that might have been more carefully phrased. He could with truth have pleaded with the great French writer that he wrote a long letter because he had not time to write a short one. The charge that the letter was evidence of intrigue, wire-pulling and petticoat influence was of course so much nonsense! Every soldier of high rank received similar letters daily throughout the War, urging them to do this or that for so-and-so. As often as not such requests were not only perfectly legitimate, but their fulfilment was of advantage to the country. Everyone who has been Military Secretary at the War Office will say such letters are quite usual even in times of peace. They are answered by a formula. If the writer is sufficiently distinguished or a close friend they are replied to personally; otherwise the Military Secretary or Aide-de-Camp writes and says pleasantly and vaguely that his Chief will of course be delighted to do all he can. Sometimes the request is stuck in a file and passed to the Department immediately responsible, with a "Can you assist, please?" Occasionally it comes back (after a civil interval) with "sorry impossible" scrawled on it and there the matter ends. It will thus be seen that all attempts to exert personal influence are almost bound to be defeated by the machine.

The letter for which the Court of Enquiry censured Cowans was very typical of the writer. It gave information of no importance whatever about a matter with which, as it happened, he had nothing at all to do. It was badly phrased—almost illiterate—and bearing all the marks of hurry. Cowans, in spite of the fact that he could write a clear official minute or memorandum on a subject he thoroughly understood, phrased his letters very carelessly. Indeed, they were written just as he would have spoken them. In the one under consideration he ended up by assuring an old friend—who, with her husband, had appealed to him—that he would "fight for her if he had time." This, the secret Court of Enquiry considered particularly reprehensible, not being able to appreciate the "frame of mind" of a man who would

always fight for a woman friend if he could—even were she in the wrong.

Briefly, the facts of the case were these. Mrs. Cornwallis-West, the wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Denbighshire, interested herself in the welfare of a young sergeant in the Royal Welch Fusiliers named Barrett. This Mr. Barrett was strongly recommended by his Commanding Officer for a commission and his claims were also pressed by Colonel and Mrs. Cornwallis-West and others, including Cowans, who was an old friend of the Cornwallis-West family.

Mr. Barrett was gazetted to a commission in the ordinary course of military routine and was subsequently transferred from the 12th Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers to the 3rd Battalion.

The immediate cause of this transfer was a letter written to Mrs. Cornwallis-West by Mr. Barrett which she considered impertinent and which she therefore forwarded to Mr. Barrett's Commanding Officer, who decided to treat the affair as a matter of discipline and to apply for Mr. Barrett's removal from the Battalion.

Mr. Barrett, although censured personally, was, so he stated, afforded no opportunity of explaining his position, and, hearing that injustice was being done, Mr. Birch, the agent to the Cornwallis-West family and to other landowners in North Wales, at the instance of his wife, brought the matter to the notice of Sir Arthur Markham.

Meantime Mrs. Cornwallis-West heard of the action Mr. Barrett's friends were taking and appealed to Cowans, but by the time he received this appeal, orders for Mr. Barrett's transfer had gone out in the ordinary course, having been sanctioned on the ground that he was not with his own battalion.

Had Cowans been content to leave the matter at that, all would have been well. Unfortunately for himself, in his desire not to appear to be ignoring the appeal of old friends, he addressed Mr. Barrett's Commanding Officer on the subject by letter and telegram, and also wrote what was construed as an indiscreet letter to Mrs. Cornwallis-West, in the following terms:

"Orders have gone by wire for B. to be transferred at once to the 3rd Battalion. It is really all we can do. I will return you all the correspondence Monday, on my return. We cannot correspond or bargain with people about letters. I think all has been done that can be done by us officially—as it would never do for us to mix ourselves up in private quarrels and misunderstandings. I am very sorry, but I am sure you will understand this—I would fight for you if I had time." [1]

About the same time Mrs. Cornwallis-West also interested herself in the advancement of Colonel T. A. Wynne-Edwards, who had written to her mentioning his desire to obtain the command of a Brigade and making somewhat disparaging references to his Brigadier, General Owen Thomas (Brigadier-General Sir Owen Thomas). Mrs. Cornwallis-West passed on to the Q.M.G. this part of the latter with the endorsement: "You will remember my writing to you some time ago about him. He certainly *has* taught O.T. *all* he knows."

Cowans forwarded this letter to General Pitcairn Campbell, who was then General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Command, and in a postscript expressed a high opinion of Colonel Wynne-Edwards and advised General Campbell to keep an eye on him; at the same time he sent a copy of this letter to Mrs. Cornwallis-West. General Campbell, however, did not see fit to take action and framed a judicious reply to a communication he received from Mrs. Cornwallis-West in which she urged him to do what Cowans had suggested.

So far as Cowans was concerned, to-day it all seems very harmless: at the most unwise. Certainly it does not appear to justify a course of action which might have deprived the country of the services of the man who was feeding and caring for millions. Unfortunately, however, the matter did not strike certain people in this light. Sir Arthur Markham took up Mr. Barrett's case, and brought it to the notice of the Prime Minister, while General Owen Thomas, having in the meantime

[1] Quoted in the Report of the Court of Enquiry.

been removed from his command for reasons which he considered inadequate, suspected the sinister influence of Mrs. Cornwallis-West, and therefore pressed for an investigation.

Mr. Lloyd George then asked the House of Commons to pass a special Act of Parliament to investigate certain matters concerning, in addition to officers, civilians whose names were not disclosed. In consequence of this the Army (Courts of Enquiry) Act of 1916 was passed without any public intimation as to the identity of the persons concerned.[1]

The Court formed to investigate the two cases sat in the Westminster Guildhall during September and October, 1916, the President being Field-Marshal Lord Nicholson, and the other members, Lord Cheylesmore (Major-General Lord Cheylesmore, K.C.V.O.), Mr. Justice Atkin and Mr. Donald Maclean, M.P., with Major H. F. Macgeagh, of the London Rifle Brigade, as Secretary.

As has been said, the matter, magnified to what he considered such absurd proportions, did but add to the already heavy burden of anxiety the Q.M.G. was bearing in his official capacity. He was indeed, and not unnaturally, furious about the whole thing, although he assisted the Court by voluntarily submitting to it all his private correspondence that could possibly be regarded as having a bearing on the case.

When the time came for him to be examined in person, however, he went into Court in a fighting spirit. He may have been undiplomatic when he answered the President's question as to whether he considered it correct to write private letters at the War Office by asking where else he would be likely to write them, as he spent most of his time there; he was certainly unwise, in replying to another question about using his influence, when he declared very pointedly that he had only done what others even senior to him had done themselves. In fact, this may be quoted as the one flagrantly tactless remark he ever made, for the retort had the sting of

[1] Technical reasons, which surely might have been surmounted, appear to have rendered this course necessary.

truth, and it rejoiced the hearts of his friends when they heard that he was " keeping his end up."

In its findings the Court, after stating that neither the grant of a commission to Mr. Barrett nor his subsequent transfer was brought about by Cowans, expressed the opinion that in concerning himself at all with Mr. Barrett's posting to commissioned rank he was occupying himself in something outside his Department, and, on the subject of the letters relating to the transfer, found as follows :

" Sir John Cowans must have known that the case was one of discipline, with which he had nothing to do, and that the proper War Office official to deal with such matters was the Director of Personal Services, under the orders of the Adjutant-General. In spite of this, Sir John Cowans thought fit to intervene by addressing Lieutenant-Colonel Delmé-Radcliffe by telegram and letter. He disclosed official information to Mrs. Cornwallis-West, and he implicated the War Office by informing Mrs. Cornwallis-West that we (*i.e.*, the War Office) had done all that could be done officially, the War Office, apart from Sir John Cowans, being at that time entirely ignorant of Mrs. Cornwallis-West's complaint and having sanctioned Second-Lieutenant Barrett's immediate transfer on the disingenuous pretext put forward by Lieutenant-Colonel Delmé-Radcliffe. Sir John Cowans depicted his frame of mind by telling Mrs. Cornwallis-West that he would fight for her if he had time.

" In our opinion this correspondence indicates on the part of Sir John Cowans not merely indiscretion, but a departure from official propriety."

At the same time the charge made by Mr. and Mrs. Birch, and repeated in Sir Arthur Markham's letter to the Prime Minister, that Cowans had given instruction for Mr. Barrett's transfer " with a view to his being sent out to France, although he was totally physically unfit," proved to be without foundation and was condemned.

With regard to the case of General Owen Thomas, it was proved that Cowans had nothing to do with his removal, but here the Court made the following criticisms :

"First, it is obviously undesirable for a high War Office official to enter into private correspondence on official questions, relating to the capacity and advancement of officers, with a lady who has nothing whatever to do with such questions. Secondly, Sir John Cowans must have observed, on reading Colonel Wynne-Edwards' letter and Mrs. Cornwallis-West's postscript, that the reference in each to Brigadier-General Owen Thomas was not complimentary; and he ought to have noticed that this letter and postscript contravened *King's Regulations*, paragraph 445. We think that the proper course would have been for Sir John Cowans to return the letter to Mrs. Cornwallis-West and to take no further action in the matter."

The result of the enquiry was made public on December 22, 1916, by Mr. Ian Macpherson (the Right Honourable Ian Macpherson, P.C.), then Under-Secretary of State for War, and speaking on behalf of Lord Derby in the House of Commons, he congratulated Mr. Barrett on his complete vindication. Mrs. Cornwallis-West was not mentioned by name, but referring to Cowans the Under-Secretary stated that in view of his distinguished war services he was retained for the present in his position, but that he had been informed of the displeasure of the Government at his act.

It is easy enough to read between the lines of this back-handed tribute; it meant simply that, had Cowans not been indispensable, the outraged Government would have signified its displeasure by kicking him down the steps of the War Office.

The circumstances in which the Act of Parliament was passed authorising the holding of the Enquiry could scarcely be defended. It was done at the instance of the Secretary of State for War for the purpose of setting up a secret Court to try officers and civilians whose names were kept secret. It savours almost of the Inquisition and it would be difficult to defend the Government and House of Commons for passing such a measure. Apart from spying in time of war, no British Government has the right to try any British subject secretly. The

findings of the Court are almost as difficult to defend. Its constitution cannot be questioned; but a more solemnly pompous finding can hardly ever have been framed on such flimsy evidence. To say that the Q.M.G. conveyed official information to Mrs. Cornwallis-West is merely to strain the language of common sense. He told her that a certain posting had taken place.

In the ordinary way there was nothing confidential about such information; it would have appeared in the Gazette within the course of a few days, and if it were giving away official information then there is hardly an officer who served throughout the War who was not at one time or another guilty of the same offence. The Q.M.G.'s support of the idea that an officer who was not a *persona grata* in one battalion should be moved to another is in conformity with Army custom from time immemorial.

The Court was on firmer ground when it found that Cowans should not have interfered in matters of discipline; but this he only did in an unofficial and friendly way, although his high position at the War Office may have lent his suggestions more weight than he realised. The fact is that the findings of the Court were as futile as its origin and purpose were dubious.

The Court's Report was published, and in a leading article *The Times* summed up the whole matter in an admirably sane and broad-minded way:

"In time of war the only points of importance are whether the Quartermaster-General, Sir John Cowans, was improperly influenced, and whether or not his Department is efficiently conducted.

"When offences come, as they are bound to come in so vast an undertaking as that in which the nation is now engaged, they should be dealt with promptly by the respective Heads of Departments and should not be inflated to a size altogether disproportionate to their real significance."

On the same day *The Times* published a long article on the work of the Quartermaster-General's Department. This was written by Colonel Repington, who had been a

subaltern with J.S.C. in the Rifle Brigade and remained his life-long friend. In the course of this article he said :

" Whether one regards the quality or the volume of the work done by the Quartermaster-General's Department during the War, and whether one selects one branch of it or another, there is no gainsaying the fact that it has been completely successful at home and abroad, and that we owe to all who have been connected with it, from highest to lowest, a debt of undying gratitude. Notwithstanding the vast scope of its activities, the knavish tricks of the enemy, and the development and evasion of hostile submarines, the British troops have invariably been well supplied with everything, excepting in Mesopotamia, which was at first under India, and scarcely a complaint has been made of the Department since the opening of the War. Whether it is supply, transport, remounts, quartering, movements, ordnance, clothing, boots, equipment, or veterinary services, the Quartermaster-General's Department under Sir John Cowans, ably seconded as he has been at home and abroad, has risen to the level of its great and most onerous respect and has merited the unstinted praise of every citizen of the Empire." [1]

It was a courteous and fair-minded act on the part of *The Times* to publish this article. It was a friendly act of Colonel Repington's to write it. Indeed, it was something even more than that, for Colonel Repington's object was to defend the whole of the Quartermaster-General's Department, for, as he shows in his book, *The World War*, he feared that besides there being " a regular set at Jack," Lloyd George's aim was to get rid of the soldiers in Cowans's Branch and in the Army Council, and to substitute civilians.[2]

After the findings of the Court had been promulgated, Cowans's first impulse was to resign, but he was strongly urged by his friends not to do so. Had he resigned he would undoubtedly have played into the

[1] *The Times*, January 5, 1917.
[2] Vide entry under November 28, 1916.

hands of the politicians. We know that Sir Frederick Smith (The Earl of Birkenhead) suggested such a course to him personally, and Cowans himself told a woman friend that Lloyd George had offered him the appointment of Quartermaster-General in France if he would leave the War Office. Cowans's reply was " Put that in writing " : apparently he thought at one time that he might be driven to accept, as is shown by the following entry in Colonel Repington's diary :

" Jack Cowans writes to me that he is to be Q.M.G. in France, and that a ' great civilian ' is to take his place. The alleged reason is that Lloyd George cannot defend him in Parliament from having written ' indiscreet private letters ! ' We have all done that, including Lloyd George and all his friends."

The reason for giving this affair more prominence than it might seem to merit will now be apparent. Cowans's behaviour may have been injudicious, but it did not warrant the action taken, and it was his misfortune that he should have given those who were against him a pretext for humbling him and baiting him at a time when he was nearly worked to death, and an excuse for trying to secure his resignation in order to serve their own ends. Had he resigned, sick and weary of the whole thing, his action would have been understandable enough, for, as we now know, he took the matter terribly to heart. A smaller man would have resigned. That Cowans did not follow his personal inclination was, as another woman friend whose sympathy he had during this trying period has said, the finest decision of his life.

Even after the Report had been published, the matter was not allowed to die a natural death, and, discussing a rumour that certain busybodies in Parliament were going to re-open it, the *World* had good cause to say :

" It might assist their decision if they were to make a mental comparison of their own services to the country during the War with those rendered by Sir John Cowans."

The case has no intrinsic importance except that it was made an instrument of persecution, was seized upon as a weapon with which to drive Cowans out of the

Army and deprive the country of his invaluable services, and was undoubtedly the cause of the death of Colonel Cornwallis-West.

It has been shown again and again how unbelievably kind and helpful Cowans was, and there can be no doubt but that sometimes his kindness was taken advantage of. It happens to everyone who tries to be helpful, and the mean-minded and narrow-hearted make that their excuse for never helping anyone but themselves. They take no risks.

In this connection the words of a friend and brother-soldier who knew Cowans well are worth remembering:

"He was almost too kind—especially to ladies—during the War and suffered by it; for, besides the one public incident—of which I knew nothing—many ladies used to make out that he told them military secrets (which I am sure he didn't) to enhance their own importance—and misquoted him: I have one particularly in mind!"

This sort of thing, of course, led to gossip and criticism. For the most part it can be dismissed as ill-informed and unimportant; but one example must, for two reasons, be dealt with; it is from a soldier of distinction who served at the War Office at different periods and it is one of the only two examples of its kind. It may not be worth while including; it is most certainly not worth suppressing. General Battersby (Major-General Thomas Battersby, C.B.) writes:

"Sir John Cowans was uniformly most kind and courteous to me, and a man whom I liked, but I am bound to say that, to my mind, a great change for the worse had taken place in the War Office since Sir Henry Brackenbury's time. The whole tone of the place seemed to me to have been lowered, and I could not absolve Sir John Cowans from all blame in the matter. He was, in my opinion, far too much influenced by letters and remarks of private persons of his acquaintance, principally ladies. In fact 'Dear Jack' became almost a proverb in the War Office. It was disconcerting, when an important piece of business was being considered, to find that . . .[1]

[1] The name of a lady is omitted.

was at the back of the decision arrived at! In fact—and my personal opinions are probably worth very little—I liked the man, I admired his abilities, but I did not respect him, as I whole-heartedly did my old chief, Sir Henry Brackenbury. You are at liberty to make any use you like of this letter, but I hardly think you will care to publish it."

General Battersby is in error in thinking there need be any hesitation in publishing his letter. The answer to it is quite simple. He is entirely mistaken in thinking than any outside influence touched, much less moulded or shaped, any official decision ever given by Cowans. This will be attested by anyone who ever served with or under him. But the fact that he was temperamentally of a broad, unconventional and open mind was with difficulty swallowed by a very few of the rigidly narrow soldiers of the older school. Then he had by merit, long service and great force of character, and, above all, by his powers of decision and fearlessness of responsibility, acquired a powerful influence at the War Office and this was perhaps in some very few instances disliked as much by military colleagues as it was by the new Secretary of State, who no doubt felt that there was not room for two kings in Brentford—or indeed any other part of the world he chose to bustle in.

Lord Ivor Spencer Churchill, who served on the Q.M.G's personal Staff during the War, sums up admirably this aspect of his late Chief's personality. What he writes is so fair that an ungrateful part of this narrative may fittingly be concluded by his graceful tribute:

"There was one predominant trait in his character, however, which the circumstances of my position gave me exceptional opportunities of appreciating and to which I hope due tribute has been paid. I refer to his exceptional personal kindness and love of helping others. I have never been fortunate enough to see these qualities exceeded in a mental equipment which was otherwise admirably adapted to meet the requirements of a public career. Such kindness was not of the negative character

so frequently met with. Moreover, it had nothing about it of the nature of a code of impersonal benevolence based on the indulgence of a moral caprice—much less was it dictated by concessions to the periodical demands of an unduly sensitive conscience. It was essentially a positive living force, and its outward expressions were the satisfactions of a deep and fundamental impulse. I think all who saw much of him fell under the spell of this extravagance of goodwill and sympathy, and I attribute his universal popularity and large circle of friends to this more than to any of his more superficial social qualifications.

"To look at the other side of the picture it was this same impulse, this aversion to disappointing the hopes entertained by others, that led to the difficulties which once or twice crossed the otherwise smooth path of his career. The official in him was never quite on even terms with the man in him and it was when these two were brought in antagonism that the danger lay in the conflict being decided in the way of least resistance. Thence it became a quantitative rather than a qualitative affair, and all who saw much of him in such situations can attest that there never was the slightest risk of any rule or regulation being infringed unless they were of an entirely trivial and academic character. I recollect you once suggested that in such trifles he would take a pleasure in bringing to bear the weight of his authority against established ruling. I think this is very likely true, but I suggest it was a reaction to his sense of responsibility over bigger issues and not, as most people think, the thin edge of a wedge that was fairly frequently applied."

That is well said and said by one who knows. We may, with these discriminating words, leave the little critics proud of their constitutional inability to appreciate anything big and spontaneous, or that is not to be found in the index of the *King's Regulations* or the *Manual of Military Law*.

§ 7

One of the Q.M.G.'s major preoccupations of the year was Mesopotamia.

Lord Curzon (the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, K.G.) had pointed out as far back as 1903 that the military defences of India should always be in a high state of efficiency, but his words were not heeded. Administration was highly centralised, and there were other faults. In 1912 a special committee had reported that India should, in grave emergency, be in a position to send a force overseas in case the Empire were in danger, and this she faithfully did in 1914. The cult of economy had long been a fetish in the Indian Army, and in sending troops to France she had exhausted her resources more than was understood at the time. The ultimate result was the failure in Mesopotamia. The whole question of the Indian Army had been under consideration when war broke out, but little had been done.

During the latter part of 1915, General Nixon (General Sir John Nixon, G.C.M.G.) had been asking for reinforcements from India and machine-guns and aircraft from home, but the War Office was not in a position to spare any help. Rivercraft of a suitable kind was essential, and it began to appear that the campaign in Mesopotamia would be a prolonged one.

Kut capitulated on April 29, all attempts to relieve it having failed and General Townshend (Major-General Sir Charles V. F. Townshend, K.C.B.) [1] and the garrison being taken prisoners.

It was now quite clear the campaign could no longer be directed from India. Serious defects in military equipment, resulting in unnecessary suffering and casualties among the troops, were allowed to persist month after month during the first fourteen months of the campaign, when the Indian Government was responsible for its management.

Control was therefore transferred to the War Office

[1] Died 1924.

and the command of the Force entrusted to Sir Stanley Maude, who refused to budge until everything in the way of transport, equipment and supplies was in working order.

When eventually he rode in triumph into Bagdad on March 11, 1917, he was rightly acclaimed as the man who turned disaster into victory. The spectacular side of the operations was impressive, but Maude himself was the first to ascribe his success to the splendid vigour and amazing organisation which his old friend and Chief, Cowans, had improvised at the War Office at a moment when it might have been thought he could not have spared a second from his great responsibilities in France and his unending worries at home.

The cabled demands of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force placed an extraordinary strain on the Q.M.G. and, apart from General Maude, his must be the credit of stepping in when India had completely failed and by the completeness and promptness of his preparations making victory possible. The situation may be summarised in General Maude's own words:

"Whenever I telegraph for anything—and this I do most days—I almost invariably, unless there is a good reason to the contrary, get a reply promising supply," he wrote home on September 9. "I cannot, for obvious reasons, mention the various items that I have demanded during the bare fortnight that I have been in command, but almost without exception I have received an instant reply saying that they will be sent. . . . So I am very hopeful that when we have time to get things running and to collect ourselves for our spring, we may be able to tackle the Turks to some effect." [1]

We know that the force was deficient, even as late as the spring of 1916, in such equipment as wire-cutters, telephones, watercarts, Verey lights, rockets, tents, mosquito-nets, sun-helmets, periscopes, telescopic sights, loophole plates, flares, bombs, hand-grenades, and even blankets and clothing. The men were sleeping in single-

[1] General Callwell's Life of *General Sir Stanley Maude*, p. 244.

fly tents that would have been healthy in a cold climate but were intolerable in Mesopotamia and, owing to their use, the casualties from sunstroke were most alarming. The standard of feeding was low and the distribution of food uneven; artillery was shamefully short; a railway which was essential to success had been projected but not built. In fact, as Sir William Robertson reported: "In general the operations were allowed in 1915 to develop without proper regard to the vital questions of supply and maintenance." [1]

Here again it is impossible to do better than quote General Altham, who was on the spot:

"The Mesopotamian campaign was again of another type. That theatre of war presented climatic difficulties, but the existence of a river navigable by ships of ocean-going tonnage up to Basra, and navigable beyond that right up to Bagdad by small craft, made the administrative problem of supplying and maintaining an army of strength sufficient to attain the latter objectives not a difficult one, provided the purpose of the expedition had been clearly defined from the outset and reasonable preparation made. Unfortunately an initial indefiniteness of purpose and the omission to allow time for preparations before giving effect to subsequent hasty decisions arrived at by a mixed committee in England resulted in a situation of considerable gravity both strategical and administrative. The campaign, it will be remembered, had up to that point been run by triple authority—the mixed committee, the India Office and the Government of India. The transfer of supreme control to the War Office with authority to issue orders direct to the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, as well as to the Commander-in-Chief in India, effected a thorough reorganisation of the administrative machinery and resources placed at the disposal of the former, and resulted in the defeat of the Turks and the occupation of Bagdad by that most gallant and able leader, Sir Stanley Maude.

[1] *Report on the Operations in Mesopotamia.*

"No soldier would for one moment detract one iota from the immense debt the Army and the Empire owe to Maude for that achievement, the success of which was due, not only to his mastery of the art of war and the brilliant leadership, but greatly to the remarkable ability and driving power displayed by him throughout the period of administrative preparation for the recapture of Kut and the final advance on Bagdad. But, if he were still with us, he would have been the first to own that that full and complete reorganisation, which enabled him to turn failure into victory, would have been impossible but for the generous and unstinted help sent him from home and India. The difficulties in this work of preparation were essentially Q. difficulties. But from the very moment the War Office Staff were allowed to assume the control, which should have been theirs from the outset, these difficulties began to diminish and were eventually swept away.

"Let it be clearly understood that the Commander-in-Chief in India and the Government of India were no less generous, no less unstinted in their help than the War Office. Indeed, the main burden of the supply and maintenance of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force continued till the very end to be borne by India. But the control of the paramount military authority co-ordinating operations with administration, and for the first time prescribing a clear military purpose and design, was the dominant factor. For this two men were responsible—Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Sir John Cowans, the Quartermaster-General to the Forces. The clear vision, the great brain of the former would not have sufficed alone, but that he had as his colleague in Cowans a great administrator, controlling a well-nigh perfected military machine.

"I have tried to set out some rude outline of a portion of the work of Sir John Cowans in the Great War, as it appeared to me who had the privilege of being in a certain sense one of the agents and overseers, at first at home, in the strain and stress of the beginning

of the Great War, and afterwards overseas. Of Gallipoli and Egypt I have written of what I saw with my own eyes. Of Mesopotamia the vision was more limited, but a month's visit, as Q.M.G. in India, gave special opportunities of realising how and by whom failure had been converted into victory. The magnitude, the complexity and the vast importance of the work of the Quartermaster-General's Department in modern war are not fully understood by the average regimental soldier and hardly at all appreciated by the civilian. Yet a close study of the greater operations of 1914-18 indicates that to attain victory strategy and administration must march hand in hand in closest touch and fullest concord one with another.

"It is the business of the administrative staff of course to accept loyally the design of the strategist and to build up machinery in conformity with it; but it is also the business of the strategist to take the utmost care that his design allows full time for administrative preparation and does not exceed the administrative capacity available. It is not too much to say that weakness in design may be made good by completeness in preparation, whereas incompleteness in the latter will often shipwreck the ideally perfect plan."

§ 8

In the autumn of the year the French began to assert their will at Verdun. Douaumont Fort was recaptured by them, to be followed a few days later by the capture of Fort Vaux. The battle of the Ancre (1916) and the battles of the Somme (1916) ended, and the Greek Provisional Government, after interminable delays, was at last in power and declared war on Germany and Bulgaria.

On December 4, Mr. Asquith resigned the Premiership, and Cowans sustained thereby his second great loss in one year.

The Q.M.G. had no marked political views and always

kept well away from politics, but he had a warm regard and great admiration for Mr. Asquith, who had unfailingly supported him in every way in his immensely difficult task of caring for and supplying the Armies. Cowans considered Mr. Asquith the only man who, as Prime Minister, could have brought the whole country unitedly into the War, because he made the noblest appeal.

On December 11, Mr. Lloyd George formed his Coalition Ministry and Lord Derby became his successor as Secretary of State for War.

In the last days of the year the new Ministries of Food, Pensions and Shipping were formed.

Cowans had passed through one of the most trying years of his whole life. The loss of Lord Kitchener; the persecution over the Cornwallis-West case; the added burden of the supplies for the Mesopotamian campaign. The feeling that his great services to the country in saving us as he undoubtedly did, from a disaster in that theatre of war were obliterated by the effects of what he considered malicious political intrigue; the resignation, if it can be so described, of Mr. Asquith; all combined to give him a feeling of resentment and bitterness to which his whole nature was by instinct a stranger.

He had, above all, determined that there was in existence something like a plot to force him to resign, filch the Quartermaster-Generalship from the Army, and either give it to a single civilian or place it in commission amongst a group of civilians.

Such pressure he determined to resist at all hazards, and from that moment this self-imposed task became the second great preoccupation of his life.

CHAPTER IV

1917

United States declares War—The Russian Revolution—Sir Guy Granet becomes Director-General of Movements and Railways—Sir Eric Geddes wishes to control ports on both sides of the Channel—General Stuart Wortley succeeded by Sir Sam Fay—The Supplies Purchase Department—Appointment of Officers in charge of messing—Schools of cookery established in France—More economies—A Blood-thirsty Messing Officer—G.H.Q. jealous of War Office interference—An Australian Commanding Officer's experiences—The Housing Question again—Possible accommodation in England—Fire prevention—Cowans a great saver and a great spender—His anxiety about man-power—The equivalent of Four Divisions transferred from Administrative Services to Fighting Units—Major Graham describes how Army economy became a business—The Company with seven shillings capital—The Army Salvage Board—The soldier teaches the civilian—A romance of salvage—Mr. I. F. Marcosson quoted—Cowans and the Board of Agriculture—Lord Ernle's recollections—Lord Weir becomes Surveyor-General of Supply—Sir Charles Harris quoted—Cowans visits France—The United States' attitude—First American troops arrive in England—General Pitcairn Campbell describes General Pershing's landing at Liverpool—Good discipline of American troops—Sir Eric Geddes First Lord of the Admiralty—First British Troops on the Italian Front—The Rapallo Conference—Supreme War Council Established—General Maxwell resigns post of Q.M.G. in France—General Travers Clarke succeeds him—Cowans not informed—His annoyance—Mr. Lloyd George and the Quartermaster-Generalship—Civilians not suitable for such a post—Cowans persists in sticking to his job.

THE spring of 1917 was crowded with momentous happenings. On February 3, one of the red letter days of the War, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Germany. Ten days or so later the British

Government gave a pledge in the House of Commons that the restitution of Alsace-Lorraine was an object of the War.

On April 6 the United States declared war on Germany. Although it was to be nearly a year before American troops were side by side with our men in France, the declaration of war had an immediate effect. It caused the enemy to pause and it heartened Britain and her Army, in spite of the fact that the Russian Revolution had begun.

In 1917, Sir Guy Granet, C.B.E., who had been appointed Deputy-Director of Military Railways in 1916, became Director-General of Movements and Railways. Consequently, in January, an important change took place in the Q.M.G.'s Department. Sir Eric Geddes (the Right Honourable Sir Eric Geddes, G.C.B.), then Director-General of Military Railways and Inspector-General of Transport in all theatres of war, intimated that he wished to control the ports on both sides of the Channel. This would have meant General Richard Stuart-Wortley occupying a subordinate position unsuited to a soldier of his rank. He therefore vacated the post of Director-General of Movements and was succeeded by Sir Sam Fay, who had a soldier as his Deputy-Director.

General Stuart-Wortley was rewarded for his fine services by being promoted and given an important appointment in France which he very much coveted.

Whatever his preoccupations, Cowans was continuously engaged on the unending problem of improving the feeding and comfort of the troops.

In order to exploit as far as possible the local resources in France for supplies which could not readily be obtained elsewhere, he had instituted, in 1916, the Supplies Purchase Department, with Headquarters in Paris. Its activities were so successful that branches were established in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Algeria; it was instrumental in buying large quantities of dried fruits, onions, pigeon food, brandy, champagne, chemicals of various kinds, linseed cake, in addition to hay and straw.

Towards the end of 1916 it had been felt that Commanding Officers and Seconds-in-Command of units should be relieved of some of their administrative burdens by the appointment of Officers specially detailed to look after the men's messing. This, it was considered, would improve training by giving the Commanding Officers more time; and the men, being better fed, could be worked harder.

These officers in charge of Messing did wonderful work and deserve more than a passing tribute. Their "light duty" as often as not consisted of anything from ten to fifteen hours a day. Their work and that of the Schools of Cookery was eventually extended to France with the happiest results. To the soldiers of the New Armies who considered the matter it always seemed odd that the pre-war standard for Army cooks was so sketchy as to be hardly worthy of the name. A man had to be a fully-trained soldier first and a cook afterwards, and there seemed to be a sort of feeling that cooking came by nature. The War, however, changed all this and in consequence the soldier is now better fed than he ever was.

Cowans himself bears testimony to the excellent results that were obtained. "As an outcome of the experience gained in these schools," he wrote, "and its practical applications to the feeding of units . . . it was found possible, in 1916 and onwards, to reduce the rations without detriment to the adequate feeding of the soldier. At the same time considerable savings to the State were effected, representing some millions of pounds per annum."

Officers were encouraged to submit ideas for effecting economies. One of the most valuable of these was the plan suggested late in the War—probably by some brilliant young accountant—of charging up to Commanding Officers at a fixed price all articles issued to them such as dubbin, boots, equipment, and so on. They thus became accountable for money and not for gear. Consequently, the regimental issue and storage arrangements became much more regular and exact. Money was saved for the

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONBLE. SIR RICHARD STUART-WORTLEY.

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tax-payer because although few officers mind writing off a dozen pair of boots or some odds and ends of clothing, all officers have a rooted objection to paying up hard cash out of their own pocket!

Every idea submitted was not so valuable. The bright young administrative officer who suggested that all cigarette ends should be collected, preserved and remade did indeed get a "mention," but it was not a complimentary one.

A certain young officer in charge of Messing was very much bored by a fat but useless Second-in-Command who was, of course, by virtue of his position, President of the Regimental Institute and, in that capacity, was troublesome without being useful. The Messing Officer therefore suggested that as the Germans were reported at that time to be boiling down their dead to make munitions, we might get even by boiling down all fat and useless Seconds-in-Command and make them into glycerine so badly needed for high explosives. Another, even more bloodthirsty, suggested that conscientious objectors could be used in this way to help their country without offence to their tender consciences.

Some units went almost mad about economies and savings—so ingrained in certain men is the miser. There was, the Lord only knows why, a market for old dried tea-leaves. These, by many units, were saved and sold for as much as two or three-pence per pound. As a unit a thousand strong drew some thirty-two pounds of tea a day, a month's savings of dried leaves was considerable. No one ever had sufficient moral courage to pursue the old dried leaves to their ultimate destination.

Another economy that was largely practised was the drying and selling of rabbit skins. The rabbit ration was never a popular one, but the monthly additions to the messing money derived from the sale of the skins was much appreciated.

There was, as has been noted already, a certain amount of jealousy in France about interference from the War Office, and to introduce into the field any improvements or economies that had been successfully tried in England

was no easy matter. Cowans had the greatest sympathy with the officer on the spot. All the Quartermaster-Generals in the various theatres of war had complete freedom. Every one of them would gladly testify that Cowans never once failed them in supplies, support, understanding or sympathy. This was really remarkable in a man who had never himself experienced the many trials and difficulties of a command in the Field.

The Q. Staff in France, however, liked to think that they were independent and self-contained units and that no officer serving at home could understand their work much less have the right to interfere with it or direct it in any way. This was all very well up to a point, but a little reflection makes it quite clear that home was the place where experiments should be made and then, if proved successful, where practicable they could be extended to war theatres. Moreover, no one part of an Army is, as such, more valuable or less necessary than another. If you were to start weighing up relative values it would be quite a tenable proposition—although not one Cowans would ever have advanced—that without the success of the work of the Quartermaster-General at home, no soldier or Commander in the field could have accomplished anything.

In the earlier stages the Army authorities in France were sceptical as to the value of savings or the possibilities of improving feeding or effecting economies under active service conditions. It, however, became apparent in time that, apart from the army zones, conditions in France were not so very different from those at home. There were enormous numbers of troops at bases, ports and Convalescent Camps who were in quite a good position to do as well in these respects as units stationed in England. Indeed better, in instances where the ration was larger and where in rest camps and so on training was not so strenuous as at home. The system of savings and economies was, therefore, gradually introduced and much good was achieved. Even the armies in reserve found it quite possible to economise and were, in some respects, ahead of the bases. All the same, the idea of

savings and economies was never, prior to the Armistice, taken up so whole-heartedly in France as at home, nor would it have been fair perhaps to expect it.

§ 2

The Australian troops came from a land flowing with meat and bread, and on landing in England their ration was larger than ours. Big brawny men with huge appetites, their senior officers were at first extremely sceptical of their living in England or France on their Australian ration, much less doing so if it were reduced to the English standard.

It became clear to them very soon, however, that different ration standards in the same army were quite impossible, and they agreed to accept the smaller English ration of meat and bread. Not only so, but they eagerly agreed with the maxim that the way to feed your men well and keep them happy, contented and fit was to make the fullest use of what was issued. They seized every opportunity of training officers and men at Schools of Cookery while training at home, and when they got out to France, they even started Schools of Economy and Cookery of their own. Extracts from letters written from France by the Second-in-Command of a Battalion in the Third Australian Division illustrate this point in an intimate way; moreover, they give an excellent picture of the life of the soldier in the trenches and in reserve, and make plain why so much of his thoughts were concentrated on food rather than on deeds of heroism:

"I wish you were coming out here to try and stop the appalling waste that goes on. The other day, going round the billets vacated by a battalion, I found thirteen shirts, five blankets, nine pairs of pants, seven vests, three pairs of boots, three coats, canteen towels, socks and so on left lying about for the French to take. I am not exaggerating when I say that at least as many more

had been sent away to the incinerator to be burnt, and all these were perfectly good and fit for reissue, and that battalion was quite a good and efficient one; what the bad ones must leave goodness only knows! And I suppose this, or worse than this, happens each time a billet is vacated.

"I often think I should really be far more usefully employed in the Salvage Corps than as Second-in-Command! They seem horribly slack and inefficient as far as my experience goes, and I believe one could save hundreds of pounds; at present the Salvage Corps only collect equipment, ammunition, and food, and refuse to touch clothes. As they are mostly sick or convalescent I suppose one must not expect much energy or keenness."

So much for wastage of clothing. In the next letter this keen young officer—he was under thirty—deals with the feeding of his men:

"As regards the men and their feeding, they really do very well on the whole, though the Company cooks want continual watching to see that they give them a decent variety. As always, they show a great tendency to let things slide, and that would mean stew from week to week.

"We build ovens wherever possible, and when we are out of the line insist on the men being given at least two baked dishes per day. We find this works admirably, and the men appreciate it very much indeed. The meat issue is rarely more than fifty per cent fresh, so that it is seldom possible to give roast more often than once in three days, but we, of course, make hot-pot and dry-hash and so on for them out of the army ration and biscuits. As a bit of a guide to them, I ran out a list of dishes from these rations, which they use with success. Of course in the trenches it is different. There are no ovens there, and I doubt very much whether the fuel at our disposal would permit of their use: so therefore the variety is limited in the extreme and we are compelled to give them mostly stews and curry. Bully beef makes quite a good curry really. The comforts people, too, give us, a supply of cocoa and milk, and we

manage to give the men in the front line hot cocoa or tea or soup three times every night. They like this, and it is most necessary for them in the cold weather; they even prefer the hot cocoa to rum, which is saying a lot.

"The hay-box cooker has proved invaluable. The scouts use it most, and when they come in—it is very strenuous work out in this weather—they are sure of getting a hot meal before they turn in. It is usually cooked at about five or six the night before and remains hot till four or five next morning, or considerably longer if necessary.

"We are issued rather flash dixie containers on the same principle, but they are not in it with the common old box packed with common hay or straw. I found great difficulty in making others believe how good they are, but once they have used them they will never be without them. Our Transport Officer swears by them. To make them use one I had personally to stand over his cook while he very unwillingly made one, and that night he equally unwillingly tried it. The drivers were to come in anything after 2 a.m., and at 5.30 p.m. he put a stew into the box for them. When they came home at about 3.30 a.m. they found it was far too hot to be eaten and they had to let it cool off before they could start. The cook discovered that he saved about fifty per cent of his fuel by its use, and he had not to sit up all night to keep the fire going. He now has three going every night, and says he will never be without them.

"I attended another Cookery School the other day—not nearly as pleasant as our last, nor as instructive I fear, but it was an outing! Another interesting point is that we now save all the dripping possible and send it back to the railhead for munitions; and it is surprising the amount that can be saved, even here."

A little later he writes again:

"Since my last letter we have been out for a couple of weeks' spell and training miles behind the line, away from the noise and bustle of war. We were billeted in two little villages in farms and barns and things, with

plenty of nice warm straw. We had plenty of good solid work by day, and the men had uninterrupted sleep by night. They could also get any quantity of eggs and things at the farm, and during the time every man must have averaged at least six eggs a day. These eggs stood to them on the march home, or rather back to the line, as, in three days on the road, not a man in the whole battalion fell out, while from other battalions as many as thirty fell out in two days. They are all very proud of the little performance. And now we have just done our first tour since we came back.

"The Commanding Officer has been on leave, and I have had the show to myself. It is a pleasure to be your own boss for a bit, I can tell you, and I have enjoyed every minute of it. The men did well, too. The enemy raided us, and we hunted them out and took a prisoner, who died—the prisoners we take have a habit of dying—and had no casualties ourselves! The men on the spot behaved splendidly, and we have had nice messages from the General Officer Commanding the Division and such people.

"The country here is at last starting to look decent, and it is nearly time too, is it not? But now it has started it is going to do it properly. I was out for a stroll to-night before dark, and it was really delightful. All the trees are out in leaf and flower, and the lilac and other flowering shrubs are beautiful. We do appreciate it, too, after the wilderness it has been up to now. Even no-man's-land is looking attractive, which is saying a lot.

"I think in my last letter I told about the straw-box. This time I have something better. You know how they tell us to make brawn from the stockpot and bully beef. Well, we insisted on the Companies having stockpots in billets and making brawn for themselves, but this was found impracticable in the trenches, and it had us beaten for a bit until a brain-wave struck someone and the difficulty was solved. We installed the Sergeant-Cook at the Quartermaster's Stores with a couple of Soyer stoves and an assistant. As soon as

the rations came in the meat was boned, the bacon also, and the rind peeled off. This was all put into a big stockpot and boiled for twenty-four hours. Then the bones were scraped clean and separated from the meat. An equal quantity of bully was added, and then all was shoved through the mincer and the brawn made in the usual way. In this manner between seventy and eighty pounds of beautiful brawn is sent up to us every day we are in the trenches. The men love it, and it gives the rations a great help along, and we save about forty pounds of meat per day. It is one of the best tips one could have, and may be useful to some of your people.

"Another little thing which has turned out an immense success is the ordinary fry-basket. We got some ordinary small mesh expanded metal and out of it made baskets about two inches deep with handles at each end to fit the field-kitchen friers. The handles fold in when required out of the way, and they are easily carried, when on the move, inside the friers. We insist on all the frying—bacon, rissoles, bread, everything—being done in deep fat, *i.e.*, there must be enough fat in the frier completely to cover the rissole or whatever is being fried, and the fat must be boiling. It makes a wonderful difference to the frièd things, and although the bulk of the fat used in frying is greater, really less fat is used, as it does not cling to the article. They all swear by them now, and would not be without them. They are really one of the most useful things we have. Each Company has four, the Transport three, and other people all have them.

"Even over here we send as much as three hundred pounds of fat per week back to railhead, and still I have heaps to fry with and to give the men to eat. But it has taken some doing. We have had to go right into the job of the Company-Quartermaster-Sergeant and reorganise it throughout; now things are going swimmingly.

"I forgot to tell you that the Sergeant-Cook makes biscuit puddings, which are packed in straw-boxes and sent up to the line hot. About eighty pounds of biscuit pudding comes up to the trenches daily, and

helps to break the monotony of the meals, which is practically unavoidable owing to the lack of facilities."

This young officer, who was Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. C. Massie, D.S.O., of the 33rd Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force, known to all Australian cricketers as "Jack Massie," writes again a little later:

"We have been having rather a mixed time here since the stunt, but are out now for a bit, I am glad to say. Our last turn in the line was no catch, I can assure you; but those times are always good when they are over. Now our only grouse is the weather, which certainly leaves a great deal to be desired.

"At one time we could not get rid of pork and beans at any price, but now we cannot get enough of them. Similarly with the meat and vegetable ration. The cheese is still a big problem with us, as we are Australians, but you English people can't get enough of it. But we are taking even to that lately, and we have invented ways of getting it up so that the men like it.

"We find out here, as at home, it pays us to cut up the bread into quarter-slices for meals. By doing this there is ample for puddings and rissoles. Biscuits, too, are excellent for everything for which flour can be used.

"I am now trying to run a canteen, and last month cleared a thousand francs for regimental funds, so you see it is a paying concern in a way, and it is a great boon to the men. We find difficulty in getting stores, but by keeping at it we are able to get a very fair stock together.

"You would be amused at present to see our cooks. The unit we relieved here moved out like real soldiers. I have never seen a unit better moved out. The field-kitchens were like new pins. All the dixies and brass work polished and shining, and the cookhouses themselves washed and clean.

"I was very glad of it, as it let our men see that what I had been saying about cleaning was not all rot. The result is that ever since they have been here they have been at theirs, and now they look something like what they ought to."

These letters may be taken as typical of what was happening all over France, and they reflect the value of the teaching at home. The Australian Army was entirely civilian, and when their troops first arrived in England they had no idea whatever as to the value—the vital necessity—of good feeding. The writer of the foregoing letters was no better—indeed he was worse—than the average in this respect. He had never thought about feeding, only about training. But he was a first-class cricketer and an athlete and he very soon jumped to it that if the men were being trained for a long and strenuous contest they must be properly fed. His insistence on the use of fat is interesting as showing how he realised its value in the dietary of men who suffered in England and in France a great deal from the cold.

At the beginning many Australian soldiers were impatient when the necessity of good feeding for men and officers was insisted on, and had not grasped the fundamental truth that where the administration of a unit is good its training and discipline are inevitably good also.

One officer commanding a Battalion of the Australians on Salisbury Plain was found using the canteen kitchen as an Officers' Mess, never having troubled even to try and establish one in the more suitable quarters provided for the purpose. When reprimanded he declared angrily that he and his men had come over from Australia to fight, not to waste time in eating! Ten days' incessant rain on the Plain (and a little good advice firmly imparted) convinced him that food had its uses.

Eventually he had one of the best officers' messes and one of the best-fed Battalions in the Division.

§ 3

We must now get back to England and the difficulties of the Quartermaster-General. By the middle of 1917 he was housing at home no less than one and three-quarter million troops, a figure which did not include the Volunteers, for whom quarters had to be found when they were

on special duty, and, in addition, had to find accommodation for all manner of ordnance stores, supplies, transport and munitions, all of which increased rapidly as the output developed, while the Flying Service also required many buildings for schools, parks and formations and sites for aerodromes. Particular difficulty was experienced in finding the necessary accommodation in London, where most available space had already been claimed by expanding Government Departments, or was required by firms doing work of national importance.

Moreover, besides finding accommodation for the troops themselves and for stores, arrangements had to be made for hospitals of all descriptions on a vast scale.

As well as the general hospitals, preparations for special institutions had to be made, and it was also unfortunately necessary to take strenuous measures to meet the constant increase of venereal disease in all the Commands, whilst the outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis entailed the preparation of specially large camps for contacts, and allotments of hospital accommodation for persons affected.

Particular arrangements had to be made for the sick and wounded of the Dominion contingents and, in addition, accommodation had to be found for the medical and nursing staff.

In the early days Cowans's policy had been to expand, as far as possible, the existing military hospitals, and, at centres such as Netley, wooden buildings were erected close to the main buildings. In other long-established training-centres no hospital of any description existed. This was so at Tidworth, where barrack rooms, without hot water or any other conveniences, had to be turned into wards. It was a disgrace that this large, permanent cavalry camp, thanks to the parsimony of previous War Office estimates, should have had no proper hospital, and had previous Secretaries of State insisted on having the money for building one the problem that arose when the War came would not have assumed such serious proportions.

Even the military hospitals which did exist were

often cheerless places without any means of recreation for patients. Visitors, however, soon began to take an interest in them and everything became much improved

In some of the large provincial towns local hospitals were handed over to the military by the authorities. Lunatic asylums were also taken over and made some of the finest hospitals in the country, while the gloomy workhouses needed a great deal of improvement to make them in any way comfortable. Many local infirmaries assisted with beds and, as the War progressed, many country-houses were given up as auxiliary hospitals, so that in 1917 the number of hospital beds provided in the United Kingdom reached three hundred and twenty thousand.

"In all this provision," wrote Cowans, "the most loyal assistance was rendered by the Local Government Board, the Board of Education, the Board of Control, the General Board of Control for Scotland, the London County Council, and the Metropolitan Asylums Board, and by the local authorities and private owners throughout the country."

In the interests of training and economy of man-power it was essential that in addition to the ordinary hospitals there should be established centres where convalescents, both officers and men, should continue their training, while still undergoing light treatment. As Cowans acknowledged:

"From the first immense assistance was given by the Territorial Force Associations, the Red Cross Society and St. John's Ambulance Association, whilst the corporations and citizens of many large towns patriotically and generously contributed buildings and large sums of money."

In addition to the requirements of our own troops, hospital accommodation had to be found for prisoners of war, of whom there were ninety thousand at one time in the United Kingdom and many more awaiting transfer from hospitals in France. "The location of this class of hospital," as Cowans stated, "was complicated in every case by objections, more or less robust, on the part

of the civil population, as in the case of hospitals for special diseases.

In some districts this feeling ran very high, and especially when circumstances made it necessary to place prisoners of war in hospitals originally designed for British troops.

The enormous growth of the hutted camps and the numbers of forage yards, rick yards and dumps scattered all over the country made it essential that special attention should be given to the fire prevention services, and for this purpose it was considered advisable to bring them definitely under the Quartermaster-General. An Inspectorate was formed for the consideration of measures for the prevention of fire, the advice of experts being called for and freely given.

Cowans records that " very great assistance in this branch of the work was offered and given by public and voluntary bodies connected with fire services, such as the National Fire Brigade Union and the British Fire Prevention Committee."

§ 4

The spirit of economy which refused to permit a crust of bread to be wasted by a soldier was practised on the largest scale. When the British turned into a nation of soldiers in 1914 they became, as it were, one enormous family which employed a housekeeper for the Army. That housekeeper was the Quartermaster-General. He fulfilled a good many other offices as well. He was given a free hand to spend. He came to spend in a day more than any other Quartermaster-General had spent in a year.

If he was a great spender, he was also a great economiser. His whole aim throughout the War may be summed up in the words " adequate supply without waste." In this he was the ideal housekeeper.

In organisation success depends more upon economy than is usually supposed. Cowans had a genius for organisation and fortunately for him and for the Army,

circumstances allowed it to have its way early in his career.

It is not impossible to trace this genius for economical organisation to his humble origin. In his young days there was no sign of it—in an expensive regiment he spent money with the best. Indeed he did so all his life, as a friend has put it, " he dripped money wherever he went," though perhaps he was judicious even in his extravagance. But for his life's work the *res augusta domi* of his childhood may have bred in him that " carefulness " which is usually considered the prerogative of the Scot, to be used, not in serving his own interests, but the interests of his country. For that carefulness—as distinct from parsimony—is the secret of most great commercial undertakings. Hundreds of examples might be quoted : those of Mr. Henry Ford and Mr. Gordon Selfridge will suffice.

In war there are economies more important than the saving of mere money. Cowans knew it. More money could always be obtained, but money could not buy man-power, nor, at the time of world shortage, could it always have bought supplies.

Therefore Cowans set himself to make the best use of all these things—man-power, supplies, shipping and money. And because he succeeded in doing this he may justly be called England's greatest war economist.

We will let him describe the task he set himself :

" From a very early period of the War strenuous efforts were made to economise resources, and this applies not only to the question of expenditure in money, but also to tonnage and the actual supply resources of the Empire. The intention had always been, firstly, to ensure that sufficient supplies should be forthcoming for the maintenance of our armies at the right place at the right time, but, subject to this, the conservation of resources, whilst at the same time assuring sufficiency for the troops, was never lost sight of. This involved careful watching of markets and production generally, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in all countries accessible to us.

" To give a few examples, it may be stated that in the

early summer of 1915, the War Office realised that the meat resources of the world would in course of time become more restricted. Steps were therefore taken to cut down consumption by the Army forthwith by one-fifth, an issue of milk being substituted for the portion of the meat issue so reduced. This, apart from the immediate annual saving of £1,250,000, effected a considerable saving of the nation's meat resources, whilst at the same time improving the ration of the soldier by an issue of milk.

"Not long afterwards it was ascertained from the Ministry of Blockade that it was desirable to restrict the export of fish from Norway to Germany. Arrangements were at once made to draw upon the sardine supply of Norway, sardines being substituted for a small portion of the meat ration, again with the effect of improving the ration by affording variation in the diet, whilst at the same time, not only conserving our own meat supply, but also restricting that of the enemy."

Details have already been given of other ways in which the Q.M.G. contrived to reduce the army rations from time to time without detriment to the feeding of the soldier. Further savings in the meat supply were effected by substituting fish, rabbits, sausages, and brawn, while by increasing the vegetable and reducing the meat in the meat-and-vegetable ration, Cowans was able to save seven thousand tons of meat a year—enough to feed ten infantry brigades at full strength for that period, or the whole of the British troops serving abroad before the War.

"What was done in the case of meat," continues Cowans, "was also done in the case of other supplies, wherever and whenever possible. For example, in the summer of 1916 it was thought that in the early part of 1917 there might be a shortage of potatoes in the United Kingdom. Efforts were at once made to enable the Expeditionary Forces in the Mediterranean to grow their own supply of potatoes, and this, after overcoming certain difficulties in connection with export permits, was successfully accomplished by means of shipping seed potatoes to these countries from Italy."

This was one of those economies which, besides effecting a saving in the supplies themselves, also effected a saving in tonnage. This was equally, if not more important, for as time went on the shortage of shipping became an increasing menace, and in addition to this, when space was available for supplies, there was always the danger of their being lost through the action of enemy submarines. So acute did this danger become that the necessity of procuring supplies for each Expeditionary Force locally as far as possible or in the countries close at hand became obvious. It was not, however, easy to do this owing to the poor resources of most of the countries—such as Macedonia or Palestine—in which the Expeditionary Forces found themselves.

Much was achieved, especially in the development of agricultural resources, by army and native labour, but even so the saving of tonnage became the outstanding need, both in ships taking supplies to the various Expeditionary Forces and in the ships which brought supplies from the ends of the world. Every available cubic foot of space had to be considered, and, with a view to this, arrangements were made when possible for articles which took up less space when manufactured to be made in the country of origin and only imported as raw material when they occupied less space in that condition.

Imports that were not absolutely necessary had to be cut down to a minimum. Consequently the importation of timber had to be reduced. It then became necessary to devise some means of packing supplies whereby the use of wood might be reduced or avoided. Early in 1917 Cowans arranged for a committee to sit at the Reserve Supply Depot at Deptford to enquire into the matter. Experts in the trade were called upon for their advice, and as a result cases for some commodities were lightened and less expensive patterns adopted, while for others substitutes for wood were found.

Difficulties were also experienced with the supply of tin plate, which ran short about the same time. Accordingly, experiments were made to substitute *papier maché*. This was found adequate for packing some supplies, such

as jam, but not so successful with others, such as biscuits, which quickly deteriorated; but in one year alone it was estimated that no less than sixteen thousand tons of steel plate were saved, and this at a time when this material was desperately needed for more essential purposes.

Originally the contractors for army food supplies provided their own packing-cases and crates, but as time went on it was found practicable for the Army Contracts Department to do so. By this arrangement 150,000 cases and crates a week were produced at a saving of nearly £10,000 a month.

§ 5

As Quartermaster-General Cowans himself was not, of course, responsible for man-power, but throughout the War he did everything he could to assist the fighting services by freeing every fit man for duty even though the continued transfers made the work of his own department infinitely more difficult. This was no less than he was by duty bound to do. At the same time his zeal in this direction is worthy of mention, for only too many heads of departments and commanders of administrative units held their most useful men, who often were incidentally the fittest men, as long as they could and sometimes longer than they should have done, as the numbers it was found possible to comb out towards the end of the War proved. Cowans himself states:

"During the War the policy of transferring to combatant arms all available non-commissioned officers and men of suitable age and medically fit was vigorously carried out. The position was reviewed monthly and no case was overlooked."

In the early days, before the requisite number of Army Service Corps officers had been trained, every one already trained was indispensable. As the Corps grew, however, young Army Service Corps officers who volunteered and could be spared were allowed to transfer to fighting units. This system obtained until May, 1917, when it was felt that it was not sufficiently far-reaching

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Sir John Cowans in his room at the War Office.

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and it was decided that, with the exception of those who were medically unfit or possessed high technical qualifications for mounted transport duties, no candidates under thirty-five years of age should be given commissions in the Corps. In addition to this, Cowans himself put forward the proposal whereby "all officers of the Royal Army Service Corps horse transport and supply serving in France and at home who were born after May 1, 1887, and who could be spared without impairing the efficiency of the Service, were compulsorily attached to fighting units for the period of the War. The proposal was approved by the Army Council. Later the system was extended to the other fronts and to some extent to the mechanical transport branch. It resulted in the provision of 1,225 young officers for fighting arms."

It is in the interests of the Corps which did so much for its brothers-in-arms in the front line, often without recognition and sometimes sneered at for having "cushy jobs," that it should be known that, anyhow after May, 1917, no officer who ought to have been elsewhere lay embusqué.

A similar line of action was taken with the non-commissioned officers and men of the home units of the Corps. In November, 1916, a scheme was started whereby all Army Service Corps privates and drivers of "A" category who were not technically skilled tradesmen were replaced by men of "B" and "C" categories and transferred to the Infantry, Artillery and Machine Gun Corps.

The scheme naturally took some time to have full effect. In the early days, men for the Army Service Corps were very urgently required to keep pace with the expanding armies and therefore it was not then possible to differentiate between those who were fit for service in the front line and those who were not. Nor in the early days was the enormous wastage of man-power foreseen. By the time it became a matter of increasing urgency, the men were trained, and had they been suddenly transferred in large numbers to fighting units serious complications would have arisen, since medically unfit men had to be trained to replace them.

Nevertheless, by the Armistice the number of men given to the fighting units in this manner was equivalent to the personnel of four Divisions, and the inevitable increases in clerks at Command Headquarters and in the Army Service Corps administrative offices were supplied as far as possible by civilians over age or by women, while strict orders were issued that all home Supply Depots should employ not less than seventy-five per cent women clerks.

Similar measures were taken with the Army Service Corps units serving in the Field. Units in the forward areas usually needed the fittest men they could get, but those on lines of communications surrendered their category "A" men. Cowans records that the arrival of eight Cape-Bay Auxiliary Horse Companies from South Africa released over two thousand men; at the Bases men were replaced by women wherever possible, and in the other Expeditionary Forces it was frequently found possible to employ native labour. For example, in Egypt half the personnel of the Army Service Corps horse transport units consisted of natives, while in Macedonia a considerable number of Macedonians, Egyptians and Maltese were employed in Divisional Trains and Field Ambulances.

It has been shown that Cowans was one of the first to realise the vast possibilities there were in the employment of women in the War, and that it was thanks to him that experiments were made in using women as drivers on the lighter type of Army vehicles. These experiments, as he himself has recorded, were found to be successful and the large numbers of women, who were subsequently enrolled in the motor-driving section of the Women's Legion, did much, not only "to meet the increasing demands of the mechanical transport service, but also to replace large numbers of mechanical transport men of high category from time to time transferred to the fighting-line."

In all 30,000 men came to be so transferred, and Cowans showed how this led "to a very considerable dilution in mechanical transport personnel, which was

reflected in increased casualties amongst the vehicles and consequent strain on repairing facilities, together with a certain amount of disorganisation through sickness amongst the low category men, as it was not realised that lorry-driving in forward areas imposed considerable mental and physical strain."

Natives were also employed where possible as drivers and artificers, and special schools for training them were established in all theatres of war. Cowans was of opinion that " the result, so far as economy in man-power was concerned, was excellent, but from a purely mechanical transport point of view there is no doubt that the native is not as efficient as the white man for the work, and vehicles suffered considerably and repairs were not so efficiently carried out."

The other Services under the Quartermaster-General were dealt with in the same fashion. In the Army Ordnance Corps the release of trained men was no easier than in the Army Service Corps, but it was done. The release from Remount Depots in the United Kingdom of men fit for the firing-line had to be carried out in spite of the difficulties presented by the handling of horses by men of inferior physique and often without previous experience; and during the War the personnel of non-commissioned officers and men in the Army Veterinary Corps was completely changed three times, which necessitated constant training of new men at a time when the work of dealing with sick animals alone was very great, for no extra establishment was allowed for training purposes.

There is no question that the removal of these men, on whose training much time and trouble had been spent, from the Administrative Services, made the work of the Quartermaster-General and of those under him far more arduous than it might otherwise have been; yet, as has been said, so far from attempting to hold men the Q.M.G. himself was always scheming to serve the fighting units by their release.

§ 6

We have seen that as early as the beginning of 1915 the Q.M.G. took the first steps to check waste and ensure the full value of the rations reaching the soldiers. Before the end of the War the economies of the Armies had become what was in effect a gigantic business. The services of business men with technical knowledge had never to be forced on the Q.M.G.: he sought them out and put them on his Staff.

The collection and disposal of army waste developed from small beginnings into an enterprise of first importance.

"Why should there be large quantities of by-products from the meat ration issue?" This was the general question, and the answer is simple. The meat was issued in bulk in a frozen or semi-frozen state. The ordinary householder who sends round to the butcher gets prepared joints.

In the process of reducing carcases to consumable proportions there is a large percentage of extra bone and fat which the butcher disposes of through trade channels and in ways which were not known to the Army. It will thus be easily realised that when meat issues were made in bulk to large concentrations of men there was unavoidable waste of the by-products.

Previous to the War the financial value of such materials was small, the recoveries were not seriously attempted and, though the proceeds of any sales were gratefully received by the C.O. for the benefit of the men, results were not subject generally to close scrutiny.

In the early days of the War it was a general complaint by the men that their food was full of grease; moreover, the camp cookhouse drains in many cases were choked with solidified fat.

At the same time the ordinary trade butchers were being deprived of hundreds of thousands of customers as those men joined the Army, and consequently the surplus did not reach the soap makers.

The bones and fats which butchers remove in the

process of making carcases into joints are sold to degreasers, who may be manufacturers of some or all of the following articles—dripping, soap, glycerine, glue, fertilisers, and feeding stuffs for chickens and pigs.

In time of war by far the most important of these by-products is glycerine, which is essential to the manufacture of high explosives, and which during the War civilians could obtain only on the orders of a doctor.

This was the sort of question which Cowans understood and tackled immediately. He directed that units must be taught to save their by-products and that a system must be evolved whereby they could be marketed to the approved and recognised glycerine manufacturers. This work was entrusted to a special Branch, Q.M.G.11, and the Committee for the Purchase of Army Camp Refuse was set up.

Two members of the Quartermaster-General's Staff sat on this committee, which met periodically.

It was a fine piece of organisation and it is invidious to mention names, nevertheless it will be generally agreed, by all who know, that Mr. V. H. Poynter, a Director of Messrs. John Knight & Son, Limited, did more than anyone else in his capacity as Honorary Secretary.

The next move was to organise and instruct the units. The principle laid down was that the man must have everything out of his meat ration that he could eat, and that the remainder must be sold for his financial benefit.

It sounds simple, but it was not so. The cookhouse staff was always changing: as soon as men began to learn they were drafted to France. Units were often apathetic, and sometimes hostile; but, by dint of patient teaching, excellent results were obtained.

It was found that the men's food was improved, stews were no longer floating with grease, dripping was systematically made and was on the table for the men when wanted, the sales of the by-products yielded results undreamt of, and consequently there was money for luxuries.

A trial was made at Catterick Camp, York, of a comparatively new process known as the "Iwel Degreasing Plant." This little factory was administered from

the Northern Command Headquarters at York by Colonel Weigall. The results were so satisfactory that the Q.M.G. decided to place similar plants wherever necessary.

It soon came to be realised that the venture must be co-ordinated and run as a business. A suggestion was put forward that a concern should be started as a Limited Company in the War Office with a nominal capital, and that all profits resulting should revert to the State.

This suggestion, which might very easily have been turned down by anyone else, was approved and backed by the Q.M.G., and Army Waste Products, Limited, was formed with an authorised capital of one hundred shares of one shilling each, of which seven were subscribed. Actually only six shillings were counted into the till, and it was a subject of argument afterwards as to which of the directors had not paid his bob!

It was surely one of the most extraordinary companies that has ever existed, and it would never have come into being if it had not been for the open-mindedness of the Q.M.G., who became its President.

The first Directors were General Landon, Chairman; Colonel Sir James Leigh Wood, K.B.E.; Major the Right Honourable Harold Baker, previously Assistant Financial Secretary to the War Office; Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Leatham Barclay, C.B.E.; Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Sykes, Director of Army Catering; Mr. F. W. Gee, Secretary and Manager; and Major Graham, who was intermediary between the War Office and the Company.

The company was carried on just like any other concern. Two prominent bankers, accustomed to think in millions, figured on the Board of a Limited Company with a subscribed capital of seven thillings (or rather of *six* shillings)!

The company had a windfall in the shape of nearly £2,000 profit earned by the Catterick plant. They had also a guarantee of £5,000 from the Treasury.

The policy of the company was that it was not in competition with anyone, nor would it embark on any scheme that might divert material from ordinary trade

channels. It had to pay the full price for all materials and also paid for military labour employed.

Within quite a short time it had some thirteen manufacturing plants working. Some were very successful, some were failures, but on the whole the company (after deducting all working expenses), made large profits, which were duly paid to the State. The shareholders were paid out and did not even retain their share certificates as a curiosity.

It is possible to obtain ten pounds of glycerine from one hundred pounds of fat, and during the War fifteen hundred tons of crude glycerine were collected from Army camps, sufficient to provide the propellant charges for twenty-eight million eighteen-pounder shells.

In addition, bread, refuse and bakery sweepings, jars, tins and rabbit skins were sold. Indeed, the value of the five and a half million rabbits skins disposed of, amounting to over £123,000, was estimated to cover half the original cost of the rabbits themselves, and the total value of the by-products sold amounted to nearly two million pounds, a sum which did not include nearly £700,000 saved in the cost of glycerine, while the improvements and economies effected in the preparation of the food by the unified system of messing resulted in a saving to the public in the messing allowance of £750,000.

Such figures as these may cause some surprise to the average tax-payer, who as a rule hears only of the waste and extravagance of Government Departments.

Subsequently, when it became essential that the public should interest itself and co-operate in salvage work, the National Salvage Department was established with the object of taking direct action in the conversion of refuse into valuable material, and in stimulating salvage work throughout the country by means of suggestion, propaganda and technical advice.

Army Waste Products, Limited, was then absorbed by a fresh company known as National Waste Products, controlled by the National Salvage Council. It had a capital of £50,000, allowed by the Treasury from Army funds and was run on wholly commercial lines. It

possessed research laboratories and factories for treating waste material, such as condemned foodstuffs and butchers offal, and converting it into foods for stock, or extracting valuable raw material for future use. A noteworthy example of the field covered by the company was at its factory in Scotland, where large quantities of oil were extracted from condemned herrings.

In this way salvage operations, in the development of which it is not too much to say that Cowans was the prime mover and the originator, from the small beginnings made in every Command in the Kingdom by his Inspectors, spread until they touched the life of the whole nation and even the armies overseas. Nothing was too small for salvage to touch, nothing too great. It was equally effective in the kitchen or in the factory, and it was the means of conserving for the country a vast amount of wealth and, even more important, a vast amount of valuable material which would otherwise have been thrown away at a time of world shortage. For this alone the Nation owes much to its Quartermaster-General, and, if the fact was not realised at the time, it is well that it should at least be realised now.

§ 7

Enough has been said to show that Cowans was a great saver as well as a great spender : a saver of money and of men, of tonnage and of supplies of every description. It was a creed for which Gladstone has been laughed at for being an apostle ; but no one laughed at Cowans. Even he, however, did not at first realise the lengths to which economy might go.

War has always been recognised as a synonym for waste. All wars in history have been wasteful of much besides life. Yet in the European War, although the wastage of life and of shipping was so tragically greater than in any previous war, the wastage of supplies came to be, proportionately, far less.

In the early days those in authority were too busy

speeding up training and production to heed. At first Cowans himself had been content to economise in his methods of purchase and provision: buying in the best market direct and eliminating the middle-man, and providing no more than the actual supply that was required.

As early as 1915 Cowans had issued orders dealing with discarded Army stores. But unfortunately these orders could not go far enough. It was not until November, 1917, that he saw his way clearly, although in the meantime much had been done. In that month, however, the salvage question was placed on a definitely organised basis as a part of the military scheme.

Consequent on visits by the Surveyor-General of Supply to France and Richborough, in November, 1917, a meeting of Members of Council and Directors was arranged, at which he proposed that a Board should be formed called the "Army Salvage Board," of which the Quartermaster-General was to be the chairman. The object was to save for the purpose of re-manufacture the very considerable quantities of unserviceable stores which were, at that time, being dumped and deteriorating both in theatres of war and at home, and thus relieve the urgent demand for raw materials for the purpose of munitions of war, the greater part of which had to be imported.

These proposals were agreed to and the Board was formed.

Once it had received assent, the Army Salvage Directorate was formed to act as the executive of the Board. The head of this organisation was the Controller of Salvage, the office being filled by Major-General L. W. Atcherley, C.M.G.[1] The functions of the Directorate were three —the collection of salvage, its transport to British ports, and, when it had been sorted, its reconditioning and reissue. Salvage Officers were appointed for each of the Home Commands and for the Expeditionary Forces, and on the Directorate were represented the Army Ordnance

[1] The appointment was subsequently successively filled by Major-General Sir John Stevens, K.C.B., and by Brigadier-General A. A. McHardy.

Department, Supplies and Transport, Royal Engineers and the Ministry of Munitions.

It was the enormous amount of discarded material accumulated at Richborough that had immediately given rise to the scheme, and it was upon this accumulation that the Salvage Board first began its operations. The chief items were articles of clothing and boots. The clothing was sorted into various grades and sent to the Army Ordnance Depot at Dewsbury to be reconditioned and reissued to the troops or, when in the form of woollen rags, to be remanufactured and either sold to the public as cloth or distributed to the Government Clothing Contractors. The Ordnance Department also had first call on the boots, selecting those which were still fit for direct reissue. The remainder were divided into five grades: some were offered for sale without repairing, some were reconditioned with slight repairs, others were marked as " repairable," while the remainder, the lowest grade, were treated as scrap leather.

This was but the beginning, for by the end of 1918 the weekly sale of boots, apart from those reconditioned, realised nearly £10,000. The operations of the Salvage Branch and the results it brought about were beyond the expectations even of those who had been responsible for its formation. Its work was not romantic, nor were its achievements spectacular, yet at the time of world shortage of supply and labour it rendered the country a service which cannot be estimated merely in terms of money.

Nor would it have attained the results it did had not every unit in the Army been called upon to co-operate.

Nothing, not even broken glass or hoof parings, was wasted. Old mutton-cloths were treated by a process which extracted tallow, which was urgently required for renovating leather articles, and the cloths themselves were subsequently used as cleaning rags. The flour adhering to the flour bags was collected; hospital dressings were sterilised and used again as cotton waste. Nearly a million pounds' worth of cloth cuttings were sold which in ordinary days would have been thrown

away, and over three million pounds' worth of rags. Chestnuts, nutshells and fruit-stones were treated for chemicals. Even old straw was reconditioned, and the metal of the toothpaste tubes used again; and, in order to obtain the best results from the campaign, close touch was kept between the Salvage Branch and the various purchasing sections, so that new stores would not be bought until it was certain that there was no supply of salvaged material available.

With wool, which is the basis of all clothing, astonishing things were done. It has been shown how Cowans had to go to the ends of the world for wool and the difficulties he had in obtaining enough for his needs, even then, in spite of the spirit of co-operation in which he was met, once it was obtained he did not let it lightly go, for it was used and used again.

The history of the material that went to make an ordinary khaki tunic from its beginning to its end would make a romance in itself: in the first place, the shearing, perhaps on a sheep ranch in New Zealand; its despatch, one amongst a thousand bales to the other side of the world, passing through danger zone after danger zone where raider lurked in the Indian Ocean and submarine in the Mediterranean or nearer home; its distribution to the Government contractors; its carding and manufacture into cloth; its cutting as a tunic and, finally, its issue to the soldier in the Field. Then after few or, more rarely, after many days, it might return torn by wire or rent by shell and stained in crimson patches with the wearer's blood. In any other war its life would then have been over. As it was, so far from being cremated in an incinerator, it was carefully sorted by women trained to this by no means pleasant-smelling occupation, and either repaired and cleaned and resurrected—or, if beyond repair, decarded, put through the mills once more and born again—this time perhaps as a cardigan or a flannel shirt.

For instance, in the workshops of the Western Command alone nearly half a million garments were repaired, at an average cost of fourpence a garment; and in a little over two years the Command Clothing Reception Depot

received over four million garments. Fifteen per cent of these it was found possible to salve and re-issue, while the remainder, amounting to seven thousand tons, were sold as rags; whereas in the old days the whole of this valuable material would have been consigned to the incinerator.

That acute observer and distinguished American journalist, Mr. Isaac F. Marcosson, gives in his book, *The Business of War*, a vivid picture of the manner in which clothing was salved in France. After suggesting that the legend of the pig squeal, phonographed in Chicago's Packingtown, to prove that the Beef Barons waste nothing, had a very real parallel in the economies with army food alone, he remarks that the Quartermaster-General one day had an inspiration about the discarded clothing and said to himself: "If these uniforms are worth $250 a ton to the junk man, they ought to be worth a good deal more to the Army. Let's try and restore them." He then describes how the great Paris Ordnance Depot, which came to employ nearly four thousand women on salvage, grew up:

"This depot began as a "Dump" for mud and blood-spattered overcoats, riding-breeches, blankets and kilts. To-day it reclaims millions of articles of wearing apparel and equipment every year, is organised like a huge business and saves John Bull a sum greater than the net profits of a full-fledged American Trust.

"I went to this depot one day last autumn.[1] Before I passed through its carefully-guarded gates the whirr of hundreds of sewing machines smote my ear. The place literally hummed with industry. Freight cars were being shunted back and forth in the yards. Army trucks loaded with clothing rattled in and out. When the luncheon whistle blew thousands of women streamed forth to get their *déjeuner*. I could not help realising that this completely equipped establishment, vibrating with energy, grew out of a pile of battle salvage and dealt with the by-products of war. . . .

[1] 1916.

"All the articles to be salvaged are sent in special trains straight from the Base Depots behind the lines to the Paris Depot. There are two stages of sorting. The stuff is first dumped into huge open sheds, where a motley assortment of French women do the overhauling. Practically all the labour is recruited from the immediate neighbourhood of the depot. It includes the wives, sisters, mothers, grandmothers and sometimes great-grandmothers (for the French woman's labours only end with the grave) of soldiers. The scene in one of these sorting-houses is as amusing as it is stuffy. You can see a wrinkled French woman with her head done up in a shawl and wearing the tunic of a sergeant in the Royal Medical Corps. The old lady is usually very proud of the Red Cross on her sleeve. Another ancient dame is swathed in the folds of an army overcoat, still spattered with the mud of Flanders; while a third may be seen attired in the closely buttoned up coat of a member of the Royal Flying Corps, which she has exhumed from some foul-smelling heap of soiled uniforms.

"These women throw the reparable articles into portable bins, which are trundled off to the cleaning rooms, whence they go to the various Reclamation Divisions. . . .

"Every article has a separate department in charge of a subordinate officer who has an adequate staff. The Paris Depot is unique in the fact that it is the one salvage place where every square inch of material that comes in is reclaimed or used in some way. The only things not salvaged are the body vermin, which are slaughtered. I speak of vermin (no well-regulated Salvage Station is complete without them) because the Paris Depot specialises in kilts which are the favourite camping-ground for the little travellers. This is in no sense a commentary on the Scotch, who regard cleanliness as the next best thing to their proverbial godliness, but because the many folds in a kilt provide a safe and snug retreat for the pests. . . .

"No feature of work at the Paris Depot is more animated than the reclamation of fur and sheepskin coats and leather jerkins worn by the motor transport

chauffeurs. During the first winter of the War thousands of these sheepskin coats were used. They soiled so easily and became infected with so much vermin that the leather jerkin was substituted and has been found to be much more practical and sanitary. These coats and jerkins are placed in huge wooden drums, in which sawdust is thrown generously. The drums are rolled by machinery and the dirt and other impurities literally dashed out of the garments. It mixes with the sawdust and is removed with it. The sawdust is then used for fuel. Five thousand of these garments can be cleaned every day. The number of leather jerkins cleaned during six months last year was exactly 298,612, which represented a saving in money to the British Government of over $500,000. Since the depot was established 700,000 jerkins and 300,000 sheepskin coats have been cleaned and restored. I might add that the renovated jerkin and fur coat is much softer and more wearable than a new garment. . . .

"At this depot I saw a pile of German top-coats captured during a big advance and which were being salvaged. Eventually they will cover the backs of Hun prisoners, who will get the surprise of their lives when perhaps their own garments will be issued to them by their foes. Such is the irony of war." [1]

§ 8

Many instances of Cowans's faculty for working harmoniously with others have been mentioned. Early in his career he had learnt how to get on with his superiors, and it was chiefly this that caused General Swaine to describe him as "an ideal Staff Officer." Later, during his co-operation with the Admiralty in the South African War, it was the same quality which made his work so outstanding a success, and when he came to fill high appointments and had many subordinates to deal with, it never deserted him. That is saying much, for tactful

[1] *The Business of War*, p. 178, *et seq.*

handling of subordinates is not invariably considered necessary in services where discipline demands unhesitating obedience.

As Q.M.G. to the Forces, however, Cowans's duties brought him in contact with many whose training and turn of thought was different from his own, sometimes wider, for the soldier's normal outlook is naturally more restricted than that of the statesman. Yet here again his tact and good sense never deserted him, and proved in fact invaluable in getting things done, thanks to his power of adapting himself to circumstances and to the outlook of those with whom he came to deal.

Throughout the War, for example, he was in close touch with the Board of Agriculture, of whom Lord Ernle was then President. Often very delicate matters had to be discussed and agreed upon, and had Cowans chosen to be pigheaded or refused to consider any point of view save that of the soldier, friction might easily have ensued. Yet Lord Ernle recalls that on no occasion was there any substantial disagreement or any trace of ill-feeling. He remembers that Cowans seized at once on the point which seemed to him essential, concentrated on securing it or getting as near to it as possible, and, in order to facilitate the attainment of his own object, conceded all other disputable points and offered the assistance of his organisation in carrying out the schemes of other Departments.

At one period the army meat reserve had sunk very low and at the request of the War Office the Cabinet asked the Board of Agriculture to supply enough home-grown beef to build up the necessary reserve. This entailed the slaughter of a large number of cattle, but it was essential that it should be done without attracting public attention. "Cowans and I," says Lord Ernle, "arranged the matter between us and set up a joint Committee, representing the War Office and the Board; the meat was found. No one was the wiser, and the reserve was built up."

During the food shortage there was a popular agitation to kill pet dogs and to stop racing. The question

was referred by the Cabinet for executive action to the President of the Board of Trade, the President of the Board of Agriculture and the War Office, whose representative was Cowans. The public had become incensed at old ladies writing to the papers to say that they could not get enough meat for their pet dogs. The Committee agreed that the question was virtually decided by the ration. The wholesale slaughter of pet dogs was unnecessary, because, if the old ladies liked to share their ration with their pets, that was their own concern. The public was not injured. Owners of pet dogs only pinched themselves. Since no harm was being done, no action was necessary.

The question of racing was not so simple. Both Lord Ernle and Cowans were convinced that to stop all racing would mean the end of breeding first-class horses in this country. Neither wished, in the middle of the War, to pander to the public taste for mere amusement, but Lord Ernle recognised that racing was in the best interests of horse breeding, and Cowans recognised that without it it would be difficult to procure the best horses for cavalry purposes.

In this connection it is interesting to recall that the late Lord Chaplin represented to Cowans there would never be any more hunting in England unless some mares were brought home from France; Cowans agreed, and in due course arranged for this to be done.

A strong case was also made for racing in the North, where it was urged that so popular an amusement acted, to a certain degree, as a safety-valve for public feeling. On the other hand, there were the transport difficulties and the timber shortage to be considered. The Board of Trade had neither the rolling-stock nor the staff to cope with the crowds attracted to race-meetings, and, owing to the extreme shortage, every scrap of timber was required for war purposes and none could be spared for barriers or stands.

Lord Ernle and Cowans, however, by working in close co-operation, found a way out. It was decided that, instead of allowing racing all over the country, the end

they both had in view would be attained by holding a limited number of meetings at one place only. For this purpose Newmarket was selected as being the most suitable. The choice limited the tax on the resources of the railway to a minimum; fewer horses and no timber required transport, and the Board of Trade undertook to convey the racing enthusiasts by a restricted number of trains. Consequently, racing was allowed at Newmarket, and stopped everywhere else.

Lord Ernle recalls this compromise as a good illustration of Cowans's great commonsense. He had gained his point—that breeding should be not only encouraged but enabled to continue. There he was content to stop, realising that in the existing state of feeling had he tried for more he might have lost everything.

" We nearly always agreed," Lord Ernle writes, " but even when we differed I recognised his great sagacity, his quickness in seeing the point, and his rapidity of decision. Moreover, I particularly admired the way in which he could work under trying conditions. Pandemonium might be going on all round him, yet I never saw him flurried or his temper ruffled."

§ 9

In March, 1917, the office of Surveyor-General of Supply was at length established. The idea had been entertained for some time by Mr. Bonar Law; he submitted it to Lord Derby, who approved, and Mr. Andrew Weir (the Lord Inverforth, P.C., D.S.M.) became Surveyor-General. When the appointment was made Lord Inverforth asked a few of his friends to help him. A large room at the War Office was put at their disposal and there they went and interviewed the Q.M.G. and the Heads of all the Departments concerned. One of the first things Lord Inverforth did was to draw up and submit a report to Lord Derby, who accepted, and said, " Go ahead." At first the Q.M.G. was inclined to view the new arrangement unfavourably; later he became enthusiastic

and indefatigably helpful. In this connection no testimony could be more valuable than that of Sir Charles Harris:

"When Mr. Andrew Weir came to the War Office as a 'business manager,' alongside the Q.M.G., in a position that was nowhere clearly set out, the weak and strong points of Cowans came at once to the surface. He never seemed to feel the necessity for clear definition of where the new authority's powers began and ended in relation to himself, or for any logical division of functions. But he told me that whatever difficulties might arise, he was going to see the Army through the War, and to subordinate all other considerations to that single aim; when difficulties came, he minimised them and held on; and the end justified him.

"In short, on his official side, he was distinctly a big, though not quite a great, man."

The ideal of Unity of Command was now to be supplemented by Unity of Stores, a unity more than ever essential in view of the certainty that the United States was at last coming into the War. The fact was that the provision of Supplies had become not only a gigantic but an exceedingly complicated task, inasmuch as a Department insisting on the provision of its own requirements might easily be trespassing on the needs of another, and thus retarding instead of hastening the progress of the War. The setting up of the new office was, therefore, of course, no reflection on the work of the Q.M.G.'s Department: it was merely a further admission that the whole world was now at war. Lord Inverforth was charged with the provision of all stores, supplies and works services required by the Army, other than those specifically assigned to other Departments, and of all stores required by the Allied Governments (with the exception of Munitions) in so far as they were purchased in this country. He was to organise industries and so control raw materials as to ensure an adequate supply. After consultation with the Finance Member of the Army Council he was to purchase in anticipation of requisitions. A general supervision over contractors and contracting was

to be exercised; information concerning probable requirements was to be obtained from the various Departments, and they were to be advised as to the possibilities of satisfying their demands.

An Advisory Board was set up with the Surveyor-General as its Chairman, and the Q.M.G., the Master-General of the Ordnance, the Finance Member, Lord Pirrie,[1] Mr. F. Dudley Docker (Mr. F. Dudley Docker, C.B.) and Mr. P. H. McClelland[2] (Sir Peter Hannay McClelland, K.B.E.) as its members. Major James B. Birkbeck was appointed Secretary.

Committees on Demand and Supply were set up, each with their own Chairman who was an acknowledged expert on the business in question. When the Department was started the names and description of the Staff occupied some eighteen pages of the *War Office Administrative Directory;* in 1918 they occupied thirty-one! Speaking generally, the more important posts were all unpaid.

The mere recital of these facts give some idea of the burden Cowans had been carrying from August, 1914.

In the summer he paid one of his few visits to France and on this occasion was accompanied by Lord Inverforth, Sir Peter McClelland and some others. At the end of July a characteristic little incident took place and once more illustrates not only his determined refusal to let the official swamp the man, but his unflinching and unchanging helpfulness. Mrs. S. Watson Manuel, his cousin and the sister of Mr. T. Wilson Fish, heard that her only boy, an officer in the Territorial Royal Field Artillery, was seriously wounded on the Western Front. Unable to obtain any further information or the name of the hospital where he had been sent, she wrote to Cowans, whom, as it happened, she had never met. He immediately replied in a warm and friendly letter, urging her not to be too anxious, had full enquiries made, and when transmitting the result to her said he was going

[1] William James, 1st Viscount Pirrie, K.P. Died 1924.
[2] Died 1924.

over to France the following week and, if it were found that the wound was really serious, he would visit the boy in hospital.' Happily a good recovery was made and all was well.

During his visits to France in 1917-18 he was frequently accompanied by General Cannot (Brigadier-General Fernand G. C. Cannot, C.B.), an officer on his Staff, whose remarkable linguistic and business abilities and varied military experience made him extraordinarily useful.

§ 10

Nothing was morally more valuable during 1917 than the attitude of the United States to the War. Now that they were at last in it they were in whole-heartedly. In April, Congress passed a Bill for raising five hundred thousand, men and a month later General Pershing (General John Joseph Pershing, G.C.B.) was appointed to the Command of the American Expeditionary Force. Further, and perhaps most significant of all, the Compulsory Service Act became the law of the United States of America. On May 19, in view of the situation in France and as an earnest of what was to come, the United States Government decided to at once send a Division to the Western Front.

In the early summer, the first contingents of Americans aroused the greatest interest in Liverpool, Salisbury and Southampton. They were everywhere received with enthusiasm, almost with affection. They were, of course, only advance contingents and for the most part consisted of Technical troops of the standing Army such as Sappers, Commissariat and Ordnance.

In May, General Pershing arrived at Liverpool and was officially welcomed by General Pitcairn Campbell, then General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Command. Admiral Stileman (Rear-Admiral Sir Harry H. Stileman, K.B.E.), representing the Navy, the Lord and Lady Mayoress of Liverpool and the Chairman and other members of the Dock Board were present.

[*By permission of General Pitcairn Campbell.*

ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST AMERICAN TROOPS IN LIVERPOOL.

Lieut.-General Sir William Pitcairn Campbell and General John Joseph Pershing, G.C.B.

Vol. II., p. 202.

General Campbell writes the following recollections of this unique, historic occasion:

"A very smart Guard of Honour, composed of Young Soldiers of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, with their goat, was drawn up on the landing-stage. General Pershing inspected them, and while they were moving off, their soldierly bearing, smartness in handling their arms and good marching made such an impression that the American Officers asked if all units of the British Army were as smart as this one. I replied, 'We hope so.'

"General Pershing noticed particularly the wound stripes on some of their sleeves, and I strongly advised him to adopt this for the American Army. He said, 'Certainly, we have much to learn from you.'

"The cinematograph operators were much in evidence, and the films taken on this occasion were shown all through the United States.

"I had a very pleasant conversation with General Pershing, much of which was, of course, of a confidential nature, and afterwards we gave him a hearty send-off to London on his way to France. One looks back with very agreeable recollections to this meeting, and we were all impressed with the strong personality of this great American soldier and watched his subsequent career with interest and enthusiasm.

"A very large Rest Camp, capable of quartering about ten thousand men, was erected at Knotty Ash, near Liverpool. Many Americans made a short stay there, and I would like to say that their discipline and general conduct was so good that neither the American Military Police nor our own ever had any trouble.

"In June and July, 1918, the Lord Mayors and Corporations of Liverpool and Manchester entertained units of the American Army. First, at Liverpool, three thousand of all ranks marched through the city and were given a great reception, and were then drawn up opposite St. George's Hall. After receiving me with a salute, they were addressed by the Lord Mayor. Later a much appreciated welcome from His Majesty was presented to every man on parade. After marching past,

the troops were handsomely entertained by the Corporation. Later, at Manchester, over fifteen hundred were brought to the city up the Ship Canal, and a similar procedure took place. After an excellent entertainment they proceeded by train direct to Southampton and were in France the following day.

"We were much struck by the look of grim determination on all these men's faces. There was hardly one that was not cleanshaven, and I remember telling the officers that I realised for the first time why we could not obtain Gillette blades in England—the American Army must have bought them all up the other side."

General Campbell's testimony to the sweet reasonableness and good discipline of the United States troops was fully borne out by their behaviour at Southampton, where no less than forty-five thousand officers and nearly a million men passed through the port.

It is true that in the earlier stages one or two Divisional Commanders were inclined to expect sea-transport accommodation on the lines of the *Berengaria ;* but there was only one instance of a Divisional Commander making himself in any way objectionable to the Port Authorities. His excessive requirements had to be submitted, therefore, to the United States Army Headquarters in England, and reasons given why they could not be fulfilled. The consequence was that within three days he found himself on the way back to the United States.

On June 13, General Pershing arrived in France, and was followed on the 25th by the first contingent of his troops. Their advent in England was not without elements of humour. The story goes that each one arrived with a Saratoga trunk, a kit-bag six feet high and, of course, a grip. Great consternation reigned when General Balfour pointed out kindly but firmly that practically all this kit would have to remain in store at Southampton.

§ 11

In September, Sir Eric Geddes became First Lord of

the Admiralty, and in November the Ministry of National Service was formed. The Q.M.G.'s duties were further complicated by the necessity for finding the special equipment and supplies required for the British troops sent to the Italian front. The Rapallo Conference took place and was followed by the appointment of the Supreme War Council which included Sir Henry Wilson, Marshal Foch, General Cadorna and General Bliss. The great battle of Cambrai was fought with disappointing results, and Russia deserted the Allies.

In December, General Maxwell resigned the post of Q.M.G. in France. The Army Council appointed General Travers Clarke (Lieutenant-General Sir Travers E. Clarke, K.C.B.) to succeed him. This appointment was made without Cowans being consulted or even informed—a lack of courtesy which he warmly resented and which it is difficult to understand or explain. It savoured of a high-handedness that was, to say the least of it, unusual. Cowans had no criticism to make against General Clarke, for whom he had the greatest admiration. He felt, however, and rightly felt, that on such an important matter he, as the Q.M.G., should have been consulted, and certainly as a member of the Army Council such was clearly his right.

When the movement to force or induce him to leave the War Office developed, it had been suggested, as we already know, that he might himself have the appointment of Q.M.G. in France if he so desired. He did not desire it; and it is quite possible that the method of appointing General Clarke was chosen as a means of making him realise that his continued inability to take broad hints was resented. That Lord Derby was in no way responsible we may be sure, because he is the soul of courtesy.

Mr. Lloyd George, rightly or wrongly, strongly held the view that a head butcher, head baker and a head candlestick maker were the proper people to feed the Army. The answer to that is that the only situation in which civilians (as such) in the Army were an unqualified success was on the Railways. There were obviously special

reasons why this was so. A railway in the war area in very much like a railway anywhere else. Moreover, the Staff work of the Movements Branch under the Q.M.G. had been, as we have seen, almost perfect, and there was that firm foundation to build upon.

It was quite another matter with supplying armies in the field. That can only successfully be done by a Staff Officer who knows intimately every branch of the service, the special and peculiar needs of every section of the Army, and the exact conditions under which they carry out their work. No civilian can possibly know all this. Equipment must not only be of the right pattern, but it must be issued in the correct way, or the purpose for which it is to be used may well be impaired if not defeated. Moreover, the good Staff Officer must himself have been a serving soldier and, as such, seen all these problems from the point of view of the serving soldier and the Commanding Officer in the field.

The one Department that was run almost entirely by civilians, the Canteens, was not a conspicuous success, and this was not because the officials responsible were not first-rate, for indeed many of them were, but because in too many instances problems were looked at, appraised and decided from the point of view of the commercial man out to consider first and last profit and loss, and not from the point of view of the soldier.

Cowans, if he were correct in thinking there was an attempt to take the Quartermaster-Generalship away from the Army, was right in resisting it to the utmost, and such action would be one deserving of the gratitude of the Army and the country.

A very slender knowledge of recent military history would have served to remind the supporters of the civilian idea that in the old days, before the establishment of the Army Service Corps, the Supply department of the Army had not only never been a success but had developed into a scandal.

Cowans knew this only too well, although the civilians at the head of the Army apparently did not.

CHAPTER V

1918

The American year—America's War measures—Shortage of tonnage—Mr. Marcosson's view of our Administrative Services—What "Hell and Maria Dawes" thought about Cowans—How the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Second Army Corps saw it—General Biddle's view of Cowans—Excellence of the American ration—American equipment—American soldier forbidden to wear darned socks—The wonderful work at Southampton port—Richborough—The Army Postal Services—A miracle of efficiency—Railways—Sir Eric Geddes—Sir Percy Girouard—Swollen civilian staff—The Slough scheme—Personal traits—The Q.M.G.'s capacity for sleep—How Wellington slept—Week-end visits—Golf—A terrier golf-ball finder—The big Push—Cowans becomes Colonel of the Gloucestershire Regiment—Very unwell—General Pitcairn Campbell and Cowans—Cowans parts with the winning ticket for the Culcutta Sweep—Just misses £60,000—General Bond describes Cowans and his methods—General Kiggell's praise—General Fowke's tribute—General Sir Herbert Lawrence quoted—Lord Plumer's opinion—Greece joins the Allies—Monsieur Caclamanos describes the Greek effort—Cowans on his quartering troubles—Brief review of the year—Lord Derby resigns—The first sign of collapse—Tumbling Empires—Foch at last in supreme control—German Armistice delegates arrive at Allied G.H.Q.—The German Emperor flies—The Armistice—Mons, 1914, to Mons, 1918.

1918 was the American year. On January 8, President Wilson[1] delivered to Congress his famous message laying down the Fourteen Points. The American troops were

[1] Woodrow Wilson, Ph.D., Litt.D., LL.D., President of the United States of America from 1913 to 1921. Died 1924.

in England or attached to British Divisions in France learning the first lessons of active service.

We will therefore pause here for the purpose of giving a brief account of the Administrative Services of the American Expeditionary Force and our relationship thereto in so far as they concerned the Quartermaster-General. All the information is based on official records or publications of the United States Government.

As Mr. Benedict Crowell, the United States Assistant Secretary of War and Director of Munitions, has stated, the normal capacity of America's peace-time production was insufficient to meet the overwhelming needs of the Allies. The manufacture of gunpowder was increased sixtyfold—yet even this was not enough. In addition, "a huge stream of materials, supplies and ammunition was flowing steadily from America to the front-line trenches in France. The Allied Governments had moulded their military programme in reliance of the continuation of this source of supply. Their troops were on the front and in contact with the enemy. Failure of supply meant disaster.

"The flow of materials from America to the armies in France could not, under any circumstances, be interfered with or curtailed. This fact was promptly recognised by the United States, and the Allied Governments were assured that America's military programme would be formulated and performed without interference with the allied programme of supply from this country.

"America's industrial contribution to the War, as a nation, was to be over and above the industrial contribution to the Allies then being made by our individual producers. This fundamental plank in the inter-Allied platform of co-operation was laid down at the very commencement of America's preparation, and it was strictly adhered to until the end of hostilities."

An examination was then made of United States weakness and strength in supply by the Inter-Allied Munitions Council in Paris, including Pershing, Robertson and Foch, by the Foreign Missions in Washington in conference with

the United States War Department and by the Allied War Ministers abroad.

An analysis of the facts of the situation disclosed, first, a critical world shortage of tonnage—which was likely to be more critical in France and England. Secondly, it was shown that the output of factories in England was being curtailed owing to lack of raw materials and semi-finished products. If the latter could be made available, factories with surplus manufacturing capital could be placed at the disposal of the United States. On the other hand, in the United States there was a surplus of raw material and unfinished products which could be made available for England, but it was considered impossible in less than one year to build up additional manufacturing capacity in the United States to supply a large army.[1]

Within six weeks of her entry into the War America had passed a Bill which initially gave her an army of two million men. She had advanced seven hundred and fifty million dollars to the Allies; had sent a flotilla of American destroyers to the submarine zones; nine Regiments of Engineers, one Division and a force of marines were on their way to France, as were ten thousand doctors and many nurses. One hundred thousand men of the new American armies were almost ready for drafting, and arrangements were in hand for training six thousand aviators and building thousands of flying machines—and all in six weeks.

During the latter half of 1917 these preparations had been increased enormously and every activity intensified, and, at last, in the spring, America was close to the firing-line and ready to bear her full share of the burden in the field.

The fundamental need from the beginning was economy in shipping. If raw material took up less space than the finished product it was shipped to England or France to be finished, or, if necessary, the process was reversed. We were willing as far as possible to manufacture such

[1] *Vide America's Munitions*, 1917-1918

equipment as the United States urgently required. When given the raw material we delivered artillery, ammunition and aeroplanes; our factories by this time being able to produce their maximum. The general principle was that none of the Allies were allowed to go without what they needed to prosecute the War if any other Ally could provide it.

As early as February General Pershing estimated that by adopting and adhering to this programme two million tons of cargo space was saved, or more than was then available for the use of the American Expeditionary Force. This spirit of co-operation was so close, cordial and successful that in an incredibly short period the two million American soldiers were ready to man the trenches.

In all these plans it is unnecessary to say the Q.M.G. played a great part. His long and varied experience placed him in a unique and authoritative position, and the Americans fully realised and took the utmost advantage of this fact.

No account of the work of Cowans could pretend to completeness that left unmentioned the great task of 1918 which was by every means in his power to make American strength in the War tell at the earliest possible moment. It will be as well to give it as Americans saw it. Even before America joined us he was in close touch with prominent American people; indeed he numbered many American residents in London amongst his friends, their buoyancy and resilience appealing to him very strongly. Speaking of the Q.M.G.'s work before 1917, Mr. Marcosson writes:

"Amid the sordid bicker and bitter backwash of the so-called peace that has followed the World War there is almost a tragic forgetfulness of the part that some men played in the great victory. This seems to apply in particular to those responsible for what might be termed the unromantic aspects of the conflict. There is no thrill, for example, in food save when you are very hungry. Petrol is as undesirable as it is unscented if it is not required. The glory and glamour belong to the fighting man. It is only in vital emergency that the practicalities

of this world assume their proper place in the scheme of things.

"Because to the average man the problems of supply and transport are regarded as commonplaces, the really brilliant achievement of General Sir John Cowans is comparatively unknown. Yet no single factor contributed more to the general result than the effort of this master-purveyor who overcame the handicap of disrupted communications on land and sea to stoke the furnace of war. That furnace was the stomach of the combatant.

"I first met General Cowans in 1917 and in circumstances which emphasised the significance of his task. It was at the high tide of German propaganda in the United States. With unlimited funds at their disposal, with a subtle and ingenious system of dissemination which had no regard for the truth, and furthermore with a large percentage of German-born subjects to act as more than willing accessories, the war effort of the Allies was being grossly minimised, even after the Somme offensive.

"The Germans, for example, widely circulated the report that the conduct of the British commissariat was inept and inadequate and pointed to the precision of the Teutonic machine as a model. In America, where the so-called science of business organisation is a fetish, this distortion of facts made a deep impression. It heartened the German sympathisers on the one hand, and discouraged the millions of Allied sympathisers on the other.

"It had been my good fortune, almost from the outbreak of hostilities, to have seen something of the British Expeditionary Force both at the front and in the rear. In the course of my work prior to the War I was called upon to describe practically all the great American industrial combines which had reached the last word in organising efficiency. What I saw in France all the way from Calais and Boulogne up to the Somme made me realise that the British supply and transport not only met every requirement of a situation whose hazards and handicaps changed with each hour, but that through the presentation of it, a constructive service could be rendered to the Allied cause.

"I therefore had the great privilege of being the first alien historian of the Army Service Corps. It was through this circumstance that I had my official contact with General Cowans at the War Office. I shall never forget that first meeting. The quiet force and almost magnetic charm of the man impressed me at once. I recall that on his desk was a sheet of paper showing the feeding strength of the British Expeditionary Force. It reminded me of the digests of daily operations such as the President of the United States Steel Corporation, for example, has placed before him every morning. I saw the parallel between the business of war and the business of industrial life. It gave me the key to a series of articles that first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* and which were afterwards assembled in book form.

"I refer to these articles because they were the first presentation in the United States of the great system that General Cowans had built up. They revealed his genius for co-ordination, but they also brought home to the American people—fifteen million persons read the *Saturady Evening Post* every week—the larger fact that Britain was doing her war job to the limit of human capacity and resource. While of course these articles were not written for propaganda, they served the largest purpose of propaganda which is to tell the truth without bias, exaggeration or prejudice.

"The explanation of the work of the Army Service Corps, however, did more. The time was drawing near when America was to throw her full weight into the struggle. It was expected of her that she would bring to it all those much-heralded potentialities for organisation. It is a further tribute to General Cowans that in the establishment of the Services of Supply of the American Expeditionary Force the charts of the Army Service Corps, both at the War Office and General Headquarters in France, were used as models. In fact, the two Services paralleled each other in nearly every major respect. Thus the genius of General Cowans was written into the story of the whole American effort overseas."

General Dawes[1] (Brigadier-General Charles Gates Dawes) is well known as a high authority on international economic questions. He is prominently connected with the Central Trust Company of Illinois and did invaluable *liaison* work between his own country and Army and ours during the War. Since then he has placed the whole of Europe, indeed the whole world, in his debt by his work as Chairman of the Inter-Allied Economic Commission. He has a way of getting things done in the minimum of time and is therefore affectionately known as " Hell and Maria Dawes." General Dawes writes :

" In the early days of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, a critical condition in regard to supplies existed. Owing to the lack of ships during the first seven months of the existence of the A.E.F. in France, from June to December, 1917, inclusive, a period when it was charged with the necessity of founding a base and line communications in such a way as not only to provide for current arrivals, but the eventual care of an army of millions, only 484,550 ship tons were directly received from trans-Atlantic shipment. During the thirty days preceding the Armistice nearly twice as much material was shipped to the A.E.F. from America as it received from there during the entire first seven months of its existence. From June, 1917, to May, 1918, inclusive—the first year—the A.E.F. received from America 2,156,238 ship tons of supplies. From June 1, 1918, to the declaring of the Armistice—five months and eleven days—it received from America 4,059,695 ship tons.

" It was in this first critical seven months that the American Expeditionary Force felt the strong and helping hand of General Sir John Cowans. During the first week of my duties as Chief of Supply Procurement of our Army in France, I was called upon by Colonel Harry Maud and his assistant, Lieutenant-Colonel G. Davison, representing General Cowans's Department of the British Army.

[1] Now (November, 1924) Vice-President elect of the United States.

"From this interview—which itself resulted in our securing from English sources over 600,000 railroad ties from Portugal, with the saving of tonnage from America incident thereto—to the end of the War, there came such addition to the material supplies of our Army as justifies the statement that without them our task would have been well-nigh impossible of accomplishment. Over two million tons of material absolutely requisite to the success of American effort in France were received by cross-channel shipping, and in the supplying of this our English cousins at the time cut deeply into their own insufficient stocks.

"It is impossible to catalogue the innumerable instances of aid of General Sir John Cowans's Department to our Army. But I remember that during the Argonne-Meuse battle, I was suddenly made directly responsible by General Pershing for our animal supply at the Front. Notwithstanding I knew at the time that the British Government was practically at the limit of its resources for artillery horses, it was with no doubt of response that I sounded the 'call of the blood' during those critical days. General Sir John Cowans, Marshal Haig, and General Travers-Clarke all immediately acted. The two English Divisions at home were stripped of their horses for our benefit.

"The advice, the services, the materials supplied, and the sympathy and generosity with which the British Government, represented by General Sir John Cowans, co-operated in supplying the American Army would make any acknowledgment, however heart-felt, inadequate.

"All American Officers who came into contact with General Sir John Cowans mourn his death as a friend and comrade."

The experience of all the American Officers in France was just the same. Colonel George S. Simmonds, who was Chief of Staff to the United States Second Army Corps, states that "the supply arrangements for the American troops on the British Front, and our relations with the British Q., were most satisfactory. This branch of the

British Staff was most helpful and efficient in its co-operation. In the determination of important supply questions and the preliminary arrangements for the settlement of claims for the large amount of material furnished us by the British, they displayed the greatest liberality—the prime consideration always being what was best to win the War."

General Biddle (Major-General John Biddle, D.S.M., K.C.B., C.V.O.), who commanded the American troops in the United Kingdom, may be taken as the spokesman of the American Army, and all Englishmen will prize the generous warmth of friendly words:

"During the year and a half I was on duty in England, when hundreds and thousands of American soldiers were passing through and many stopping for training, there was naturally much dealing with the Quartermaster-General's office and with General Cowans personally.

"The qualities of General Cowans that most impressed me were his wonderful capacity and his great courtesy and personal charm. His way of doing big things, with so much ease, so little fuss, so little apparent haste, excited our admiration; and everything we asked for came to us almost before the time promised, just what we needed and in ample quantities.

"One of the acts, among many, which showed his great generosity of spirit was this. American soldiers passing through England and France made much use of the excellent British canteens, located everywhere. The articles sold, food and clothing, were so good, and relatively cheap, that our soldiers bought largely and were glad to be able to do so. We were only passers-by, taking advantage of the chance for our own benefit, and yet, when accounts were made up and the British Army and Navy Canteen declared a profit, General Cowans and his associates sent a cheque, of about eleven thousand pounds, as our proportionate share. There was no claim on our part, no thought that any money would be given, yet the characteristic honesty and square dealing of the Board demanded of them that they give us a proportionate part.

"General Cowans was a great man, a great man for the work he had to do. Great Britain was fortunate in

having such a man during the long struggle, one who made his Department as efficient, as perfect as a Department could be, and America was fortunate, in the many dealings, to have such understanding, such competent, such liberal, such courteous Officers as General Cowans and many others in the War Office and outside.

"And those of us, who had the privilege of close personal relations with Sir John Cowans can never forget his friendliness, and good companionship, and will regret always that he met so early a death."

The American Service of Supplies was, as Mr. Marcosson has pointed out, largely remodelled to bring it into line with ours, another evidence, were one needed, of that country's determination from the outset to work for perfect co-operation. Their feeding and clothing arrangements were in some ways different to ours, and a few words on the subject has a human as well as an historic interest. As Mr. Benedict Crowell pithily says, "When the American soldier went to war he took his appetite with him"; and the American people certainly saw that his appetite was generously supplied with such things as it liked.

The ration of the American soldier was more varied than ours. He got twenty ounces of boneless meat—sent over in that state to save trouble and tonnage—and it is interesting in view of this that the Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services in the Southern Command tried hard to get a central meat establishment at Tidworth where meat could be boned, dressed and prepared for cooking and issued in that state to the units. The Americans consumed vast quantities of tomatoes—which the British troops did not care for—and tomato juice was served to American troops in the field as a thirst quencher. Dehydrated vegetables, cooked wheat, chocolate, coffee, candy, chewing-gum and, later, tobacco, were all included. It is said that the average American soldier at the end of the fighting weighed twelve pounds more than he did on enlistment; at the Armistice they were certainly consuming nine million pounds of food daily.

It is interesting to know that the senior Officers of the American Expeditionary Force did not approve of their

soldiers' uniform and considered that it compared unfavourably with that of our smartly-dressed troops. On General Pershing's recommendation a new uniform was designed, and a new cap, but they never got the length of being issued. Puttees, hitherto unknown, were also adapted and worn. No American soldier was allowed to wear darned socks unless, as the Regulation quaintly put it, "he wore two pair at once." One would have thought two pairs of darned socks would be just twice as uncomfortable as one. The stout British Army boot was also adopted.

The American Service rifle was a slightly-modified British 1917 Enfield, and they adopted, with a minor alteration, the British bayonet.

Practically every American soldier who went to France passed through Southampton, and great numbers of them remained some time in the American Rest Camp there. Everywhere they went they made friends, but in Southampton they were peculiarly at home.

As has been said, Southampton was our Number 1 Port, and from the day mobilisation was ordered till the day he left the War Office it figured largely in the activities of the Q.M.G.'s Department.

General Balfour, who had succeeded General Hamilton early in the War, had the assistance successively on the Naval side of Captain Hubert Stansbury, C.B., R.N., Commodore W. Bourchier S. Wrey, C.M.G., R.N., Captain H. M. Perfect, R.N., and Captain Alston, R.N. The United States Officers told off to help him were Captain E. H. Morse, D.S.O., of the Marine Corps, and Captain J. P. Henry, and most efficiently and pleasantly did they carry out their duties. Major-General G. G. Blackader, C.B., was General Officer commanding Town and Port.

It is not generally known that the French and Italian Expeditions to Murman made up at Southampton. The largest shipment of troops in one day was on August 22, 1914; the largest shipment of horses in a week was in 1917, when just over ten thousand five hundred were sent across. The largest amount of ammunition shipped in one

day was in April, 1917, and it weighed ten thousand three hundred tons. The average daily shipment of ammunition during the month of June, 1917, was valued at one million pounds. The largest shell dealt with was a 17" Austrian, which weighed one and a half tons and was five feet four inches in height. At noon, on November 24, 1916, the ten thousandth special troop train entered the docks. On March 4, 1917, on the ss. *Karnak*, one officer, forty-one men, thirty-two horses, two four-wheels and sixteen two-wheels were detrained and embarked in twenty-nine minutes.

The port casualties from first to last were four men, eight horses, eight wagons and one gun!

Speaking of this side of the work of the Q.M.G., Lieutenant-Colonel M. R. Hilgard of the General Staff of the United States Army says:

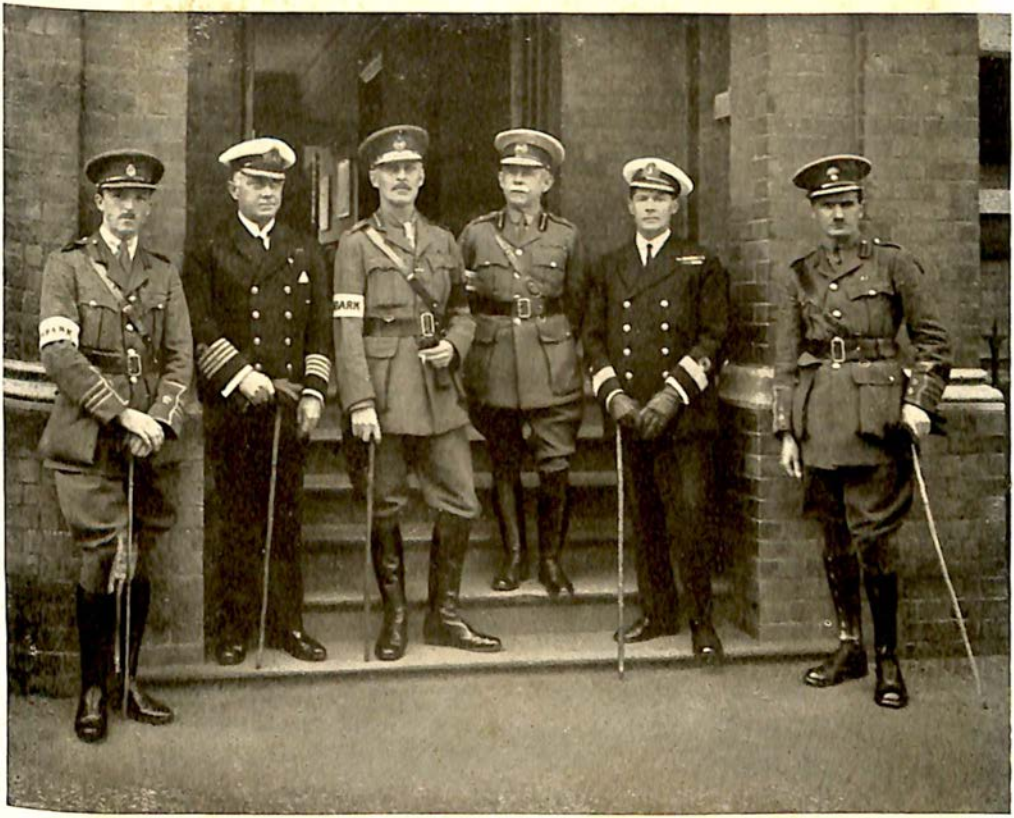
"From my own personal and brief observations of the working of their Ports of Debarkation, Depot, Installations, Regulating Stations, Refilling and Distributing Points, I was greatly impressed with the thorough efficiency, despatch and smoothness with which all matters relating to supply and transportation were handled thereat."

§ 2

One of the most interesting and noteworthy developments of the War was that in connection with the use of waterways for transport purposes.

The starting and development of Richborough, the old Roman Fort of Rutupiæ, was a feat of great magnitude. Brigadier-General Albert S. Collard, C.B., who was Deputy-Assistant-Director of Movements at the War Office, and who was in charge of the port from its inception, gives the following brief account:

"My association with Sir John Cowans was from almost the commencement of the War up to May, 1917, but more particularly from January, 1915, when I started Q.M.G. 2.D. Branch of the Directorate of Movements. This branch was started for the control of all Inland Water Transport, particularly in France.



No. 1 Port (Southampton) Embarkation Staff.

From left to right: Major M. Leslie, R.A.M.C. (A.D.M.S.); Captain H. M. Perfect, R.N. (P.N.T.O.); Brig.-Gen. Sir Alfred G. Balfour, K.B.E., C.B.; Surg.-General Sir William Donovan, K.C.B. (D.M.S.); Commodore W. B. Wrey, C.M.G., R.N.; Lieut.-Colonel L. G. Tempest Stone, C.M.G. (Asst. Emb. Com.).

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" Belgian and Dutch barges were purchased in Holland, brought to this country by agents, and then towed to France. Canal tugs were purchased in the same manner. Although several hundred barges were thus obtained, it was found not to be sufficient, and we built large numbers in the country and some in sections in Canada.

" The advantage of canal transport was soon found to be very effective, and their immunity from torpedo attack in crossing the Channel brought about a decision to have special sea-going barges constructed, taking ammunition across the Channel and straight up to the dumps behind the firing-line.

" The accommodation in the ports on the South Coast was soon found to be insufficient to carry this scheme out on a necessarily large enough scale, and therefore it was decided to build a special port, and after very careful survey of all the likely points between the Thames and the Isle of Wight, the mouth of the Stour, between Sandwich and Pegwell Bay, was selected.

" This site was practically the same as the old Roman Fort of Richborough, and I therefore chose this as the name for it.

" Sir John Cowans came down with me to Sandwich, saw the site and approved of it, and agreed to move the Inland Water Transport, Royal Engineer Depot, from Longmore to Richborough.

" This new port depot developed very rapidly to large dimensions until twenty thousand men were accommodated there, and a volume of traffic in ammunition alone was worked up to four thousand tons a day.

" The next step in the development was the adoption of my scheme for train-ferries from the South Coast to the French ports. The main terminal in this country was built at Richborough and a subsidiary terminal at Southampton. Terminals were constructed at Dunkirk, Calais and Dieppe, the other side.

" The train-ferries were built to carry fifty-two loaded goods wagons. The trains were run direct to the boats on this side and run off on the other side direct to the

railway system. These train-ferries proved especially useful in taking over large rolling stock—ambulance trains, locomotives and the big siege guns and so on—all of which we were able to run over on their own wheels and save the labour of loading them in and out of the holds of the vessels.

"The barge service was also used for howitzers and Field Artillery, and on the return voyage they brought back large quantities of ammunition boxes, shell and cartridge cases and so on for re-filling.

"Whilst Richborough was being developed, the War Office took over the control of the Mesopotamian Armies and the Q.M.G. handed over to me the organisation of the River Transport in Mesopotamia.

"Large numbers of river-craft were purchased in all parts of the world, and, further, large quantities were built in this country, and the whole transport system in Mesopotamia re-organised to relieve Kut and take Bagdad.

"The next step in the development was when Sir Eric Geddes was appointed Director-General of Transport, the docks were added to Q.M.G. 2.D., the description was changed from Inland Water Transport to Inland Waterways and Docks and the Department renamed Military Railways, and Q.M.G. 2.D. became M.R.3 and special Companies were formed for the repairing and up-keep of the docks in all the theatres of the War.

"The river transport in Egypt was also taken over as well as all the lightering at the ports and on the Suez Canal, and also in East Africa and the other war theatres.

"An attempt was also made to relieve the Serbian Army, and the Inland Waterways and Docks controlled the transport of the Serbian Army to Corfu, and, later again, when it was transferred to Salonica."

The train-ferry was expensive, perhaps, but it saved time and, saving time, saved human life. In the ordinary way a gun had to be dismantled here and reassembled in France; this took about four weeks. Via Richborough no dismantling was necessary, as it went direct from the rail to the ferry and on to the rail again at the other end.

The result was it took only four days to reach the firing-line.

In addition to all this, Richborough was one of the best examples of a well-run central-messing system, which is not surprising when we know it was organised by Major Montagu I. Gluckstein, O.B.E., one of the Principals of the great firm of Messrs. Lyons. Richborough mess started in 1917 with something like three thousand men. Although nominally Royal Engineers, they were, of course, really civilians. Feeding them was therefore a very difficult problem, as their discipline was naturally not quite that of a Guards Battalion. Some one thousand five hundred men were on an average employed on the barges, and these, being away from their headquarters for seven or eight days at a time, had to take their rations with them and cook them in such improvised ways as were available.

When Richborough was at its strongest, towards the end of 1918, the number of men was about twenty-eight thousand. There was, of course, a common diet sheet. Civilian chefs were put in charge and paid out of Regimental funds. The experience there, as elsewhere, was that the Army ration was very fine and far too large when men were being fed in any considerable numbers. The result was that rations to the value of many thousands of pounds were underdrawn. This is a notable testimony when it is remembered that the men were very hard-worked and had enormous appetites.

Not the least interesting part of this centralised-messing scheme was the officers' mess. It contained on an average three hundred; their rations were handed over to the caterer, and in addition all they were called upon to pay was sixpence per day! This is very remarkable in view of the fact that the War Office considered 2s. or 2s. 6d. per day quite a modest mess subscription for officers in 1918. As in the messes of the men, a civilian chef was engaged and paid the handsome sum of £7 per week, and he was well worth it.

As for the mess funds both of officers and men, they were so large Major Gluckstein hardly knew what to do

with them. The kitchens were supplied with the very latest type of equipment; the mess-rooms were well furnished; billiard tables were purchased, and there was so much money to spare for sports and entertainments that on one August Bank Holiday five thousand guests were entertained without calling on the mess for a penny subscription.

The reasons for this great success were three fold. First of all the officer-in-charge was an expert and a brilliant organiser. He realised that goods well bought are already half sold, and his purchases out of the commuted allowance and Regimental funds were made with the maximum of skill and prudence. Secondly, he did not rely on the meagre Royal Engineer equipment of the ordinary cookhouse; and, thirdly, all his head cooks were highly-trained and highly-paid men. It has been well said that God sends food but the devil sends cooks, and the very greatest cause of discomfort and waste in the Army was the absence of trained cooks. The food issued was excellent; but it was often misused. The ration being designed to feed a few men on isolated outpost duty was not only ample but far too big when there was any considerable number, but this was not always realised.

The one crab Major Gluckstein had to put up with in connection with his officers' mess was that when the members went up to town for a "bust" they invariably went to the Trocadero, where they were charged ten-and-six for a dinner very little, if anything, better than they got at Richborough. The result was that nothing would convince them that Messrs. Lyons did not make ten shillings profit on every dinner they served!

§ 3

The Army Postal Service, which automatically comes under the control of the Q.M.G. on the outbreak of hostilities, was one of the miracles of the War. The Director from 1914 was General Price (Brigadier-General William

Price, C.B.), who had as his Deputy-Directors, Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Warren, C.M.G., Colonel T. Kelly, C.M.G., and Colonel D. L. Lidbury, D.S.O.

The following modest account of a work that has deservedly received unquestioned praise and admiration is from the pen of Colonel Lidbury:

"The Army Postal Service is a Reserve Unit of the Royal Engineers. It is the successor of the Army Postal Corps which first saw active service in Egypt in 1882, and it reached its present status in 1913.

"At the beginning of the War it took the field with the B.E.F. some two hundred and fifty strong. Its expansion was necessarily rapid. It threw off branches successively for the Postal Service of the Dardanelles Expedition, the Salonika, East Africa, Italian and North Russia Forces, each with its own Directorate and its own peculiar transport problems. By the end of 1917 the total personnel employed overseas in the various theatres of war amounted to between three thousand and four thousand.

"All sections of the Service had a common Base in London, whose separate bags were made up for each unit from an Infantry Battalion to a Field Bakery. Even an X-ray unit or a Divisional Shoemaker's Shop had its own distinct letter and parcel bags. The Base Sorting Office originally occupied two rooms at Mount Pleasant and on August 4, 1914, employed a staff of thirty. In course of time this staff grew to two thousand five hundred and forty, largely women and disabled soldiers, and the ultimate sorting accommodation included an office of over five acres in Regent's Park, which is claimed to have been the largest wooden building in the world.

"The returns of parcels despatched from the Home Depot showed, in October, 1914, a weekly average of sixty thousand. In April, 1917, the weekly average was nine hundred and fifty-eight thousand, of which eight hundred and eighty-three thousand were for the B.E.F. During this period the soldier was almost entirely dependent upon the Army Postal Service for luxuries and comforts and the effect of an efficient service upon the morale of

the troops cannot be over-estimated. During the later stages of the War the development of the canteen and similar facilities in the field led to a considerable reduction in the number of parcels sent out from home as people found that a postal order answered the same purpose, but in the end there was no lack of appreciation of the organisation which could bring a parcel from home to Jerusalem, Archangel, Bagdad, or Batum.

"During the four weeks prior to Christmas, 1916, the parcels despatched to the British Expeditionary Force alone numbered four million six hundred and sixty thousand. This represented the high-water-mark of the Postal Service; but even later the combined weight of mails despatched to Expeditionary Forces amounted to ten thousand and fifty tons per week, and in addition to the heavy parcel post some twelve million, five hundred thousand letters a week, or one million, seven hundred and sixty thousand items per day, including Sundays, were sent out to the various fronts. The soldier is a good correspondent, and the statistics show that for practically every letter sent out to the front a letter came home.

"In 1917, owing to the extreme pressure upon the Base Post Office, it was found necessary to decentralise, and from that time a proportion of the work was devolved upon Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol, Birmingham and Glasgow Post Offices. When the Armistice was declared, Concentration Offices were handling half the work for the British Expeditionary Force; Sheffield alone was making up one thousand bags of parcels a day. During the Christmas pressure special through railway vans were run from each Concentration Office to Folkestone and Southampton.

"Briefly, the ordinary system of distribution in France during operations was by supply train from the Base to Divisional Railhead, thence by Divisional Supply Column to 'Refilling Point,' where distribution was made to unit Post Orderlies, frequently under fire. There were normally about two hundred and fifty bags of mails per Division. The orderly took his mails as far as the Quarter-

master's store, in the case of units in the line, and from this point they were sent up with the rations each night to the trenches. The ration party brought back postings, which were taken down by the mail lorries next day to Refilling Point.

"There were also Cross Posts between all Army Headquarters, and during the long period of trench warfare a letter posted anywhere in one Army Area would usually be delivered in any other Army Area within twenty-four hours. There were also special services between Corps and Divisional Headquarters to lighten the work of Army Signals.

"For the benefit of G.H.Q. and Headquarters of Armies, Corps and Divisions an Express Service was run daily from the Base. Before the lengthening of lines of communication, at each of these Headquarters, and frequently at Brigade Headquarters as well, *The Times* could be read on the day of issue.

"This is of course only a general idea of a Field system: it underwent the necessary local modification in the different theatres and included Travelling Post Offices on Italian, Bagdad and Murmansk Railways and a 300-mile sleigh service round the White Sea, employing four hundred horses in relays.

"It will be seen that the whole fabric of the Army Postal Service was based on an elasticity sufficient to meet conditions which were constantly changing. To secure this, an officer, possessed of the necessary technical qualifications, was attached as Assistant-Director of Postal Services at Headquarters of each Army, with a Deputy-Assistant-Director with each Corps.

"The transport arrangements to the various theatres were subject to a full share of the vicissitudes of war. The routes had to be modified to meet changing conditions; at one period in 1914 every letter and parcel had to be sent round by transport to St. Nazaire—the one line of communication.

"This was only for a short time, however; and for a long time every service available was used, and the mails were sometimes sent across the Channel by as many

as six steamers a day. But from the transport point of view the B.E.F. service was of course the simplest. The difficulties which beset the mail service to the Dardanelles were formidable and have probably never been fully appreciated by the public, who from their experience with soldiers in France had come to take a rapid and regular postal service as a matter of course.

"Parcels for the Dardanelles were despatched by P. and O. route from the Thames to Port Said; letters went overland and caught the mail-boat at Marseilles. At Port Said mails were transferred to the Egyptian Post Office and conveyed to Alexandria, where they were conveyed to the Base Post Office by native labourers, relabelled with the location of the respective units and transmitted to Mudros by any available transport and by routes which varied with the activities of German submarines. At Mudros each bag was re-labelled according to the location of the unit to one of the three Gallipoli beaches—Helles, Anzac, or Sulva—to which it was conveyed by a trawler, or a minesweeper which would probably be in private life a Bristol Channel excursion boat.

"All landings being covered by Turkish gun-fire, the transfer to lighters and thence to the beach was in most cases performed by the light of a couple of candles. Each beach had its Army Post Offices, where the letters were sorted to Brigades. The tent in which the Army Post Office at Cape Helles was situated, though constantly ripped and pierced by shrapnel and fragments of H.E. shell, did not receive its mortal blow till the morning after the evacuation, when a high-explosive shell blew it to bits.

"In 1917 the time of transit for a letter from London to Salonika was about seventeen days and that of parcels much longer mainly owing to the difficulties of navigation in the Mediterranean. The opening of the Cherbourg-Taranto route effected considerable improvement. British Army Post Offices were opened at Cherbourg, Lyons and Taranto, from which point onward transmission was by transport to Itea, thence by road to Bralo and by railway to Salonika.

"The Postal Service to the Mesopotamian and East African Expeditionary Forces was provided by the Government of India and the responsibility of the Home Post Office was limited to the transmission of mails as far as Bombay and Dar-es-Salaam respectively. Transport to North Russia depended entirely on store-ships.

"The *post-bellum* activities of the Army Postal Service included co-operation in the re-establishment of civilian services to Bulgaria, Rumania, Turkey, Jugo-Slavia, Serbia, South Russia and Persia.

"One of the principal difficulties throughout was the delivery of letters to casualties. In the most distant theatres the Army Base Post Office maintained a complete index of all admissions to and discharges from hospitals and from these lists endeavoured to redirect all letters and parcels sent back from the Field because of the evacuation of the addressed to hospital. The large number and wide distribution of the hospitals made this no easy task; but the difficulties were surmounted and eventually nearly every letter for a sick or wounded man found its way to his bedside in hospital.

"The personnel of the Army Postal Service, officers and men, was recruited from established Post Office servants, and to this fact the unquestioned success of the Service must be largely attributed. In more than one case a man who, prior to 1914, had sorted or delivered letters for eight hours daily in a provincial town found himself called upon to save the mails of a Brigade by the exercise of his own ingenuity. How well the men succeeded in tasks of this nature may be judged from the fact that even in the German push of 1918 hardly a mail-bag was lost. In spite of the constant movements and the apparent chaos of a retreating Army the units were sooner or later found and their mails duly handed over to them.

"The Army Postal Service made a considerable use of the services of women for sorting letters in the London Base Post Office. Some twelve hundred were employed at the time of the Armistice; and they did work of great value. In spite of the great complexity of the sorting of

the Army correspondence, which of course had to keep pace with the growing intricacy of the military organisation, they showed marked aptitude for the work, and both proved both zealous and competent."

§ 4

When Mr. Lloyd George assumed direction of the Ministry of Munitions in 1915, it is doubtful if, in a military sense, he knew that Railways existed.

However, in July, 1916, he sent Sir Eric Geddes to France, who, after examining the Railway situation, made a report. During 1917, Sir Eric became an additional member of the Board of Admiralty, Navy Controller and a temporary Honorary Vice-Admiral. This officer has been given high praise for brilliant achievements and deserves every word of it. But he worked under advantages such as no soldier—not even Lord Kitchener or the Quartermaster-General himself—could ever hope to enjoy. Let us see what they were.

He became, by a stroke of the politician's pen, an Honorary Major-General in the Army, and, later, a temporary Honorary Vice-Admiral in the Navy—no less! He was given an over-riding civilian authority—as directly representing the Cabinet—and had unlimited powers as regards finance, rank, promotions, dismissals and so on. This was a long way from the days when it might be hazarded that none of the North Eastern Railway officials would have recognised a Railway Transport Officer on sight!

Early in the War, Lord Kitchener sent Sir Percy Girouard to France to examine the whole question of Railway Transport System on the Lines of Communications.

He, in due course, submitted a report which, however, appears to have been shelved.

Cowans, with that unnamable and indefinable quality which throughout his career stood him in such good stead, as usual sensed the future, and realised that

there might be difficulties ahead. He was never quite at his ease about the question or satisfied that Transport was being viewed in France with a broad and comprehensive vision, foreseeing the enormous demands that would be made once the static war again became a moving one.

That this is so is proved by Sir Percy Girouard's visit to France at least two years before Sir Eric Geddes was appointed. Moreover, Lord Kitchener sent the Quartermaster-General himself to France on more than one occasion to impress on the Commanders-in-Chief the importance of constructing light railways.[1]

Sir Eric achieved marvels; costly marvels it is true, but had Lord Kitchener's foresight and that of Cowans's been utilised they might have been earlier reached by much less drastic means and at a far lower cost. It must never be forgotten that for about two years the Railways in France were run by a few hundred officers of comparatively subordinate rank, and run successfully. Their limitations in power and in numbers must always be borne in mind, as must also the fact that later under civilian control the Railway Staff was enormously swollen. It should also be remembered that by 1916 the whole question had become much more difficult by reason of the increasing shortage of tonnage owing to the multiplication of demands from other theatres of war. A good deal therefore depended on the Admiralty and, after its formation, on the Ministry of Shipping. It may therefore well have been that only an officer armed with the wide and unusual powers of Sir Eric Geddes could have carried on the task. Nevertheless, our early indebtedness to the soldiers remains.

§ 5

In the early part of the year Cowans had at last succeeded, with the splendid help of Lord Inverforth and General Crofton Atkins, in getting the Slough scheme

[1] Sir George Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener.*

going. The War ended six months earlier than anyone had expected, and the delay caused by the Treasury prevented the depot being got under way at the time the G.H.Q. planned, and when it was most urgently needed, and seriously impaired its usefulness from an Army point of view. The Government later got into a panic about it, and it was profitably sold to the Slough Trading Company.

In view of the amount of publicity given to the matter in the Press from time to time, it will be of interest to quote Cowans's own words about the difficulties with which the authorities had to contend, especially towards the end of the War.

"The operations up to the time of the Armistice put a very heavy strain on mechanical transport and reduced the reserve in this country to a dangerously low figure, and undoubtedly, if operations had continued on the same scale, great difficulty would have been experienced in maintaining the mechanical transport services. This was foreseen and every effort was made to increase the output of existing repair shops and to press on with the completion of the Slough shop."

The depot was not, however, completed by the end of the War, and demobilisation made things worse. Cowans reported:

"Considerable difficulty was experienced in finding accommodation for the vast number of mechanical transport vehicles in the country without interfering with the re-establishment of private industries. The owners of the various garages and industrial premises used for accommodation of mechanical transport vehicles naturally desired to restart their businesses. The urgent need for some large depot, such as that at Slough, where such vehicles could be stored and dealt with, was made very obvious to the Directorate of Quartering. . . .

"In December, 1918, pressure was brought to bear for Kempton Park to be evacuated in order that racing might be resumed. It was pointed out at the time that the movement of these vehicles at a time when the ground was in a very wet condition was undesirable, but

in spite of this it was decided that evacuation must be proceeded with at all possible speed.

" As was anticipated, the ground was very badly cut up and the drainage system destroyed, with the result that the vehicles became bogged and considerable damage was done in extricating them. Further, this evacuation took place at a time when demobilisation had so reduced the personnel of mechanical transport that there were not sufficient skilled men left to do the work, with the result that semi-skilled men had to be employed, all of which tended to impede the work and damage the vehicles. However, these difficulties were eventually overcome, and vehicles were evacuated to Slough in large numbers, where good standing ground had been constructed."

Eventually, when the armies overseas had been reduced and the situation became easier, Slough Depot was used partly to maintain the vehicles in the Army of Occupation and also to recondition for sale all the vehicles no longer required by the War Office. That, at least, was the programme, and a vast number of lorries cars and motor-bicycles were reconditioned and sold. That vast numbers remained is a melancholy fact, but at the same time the establishment of the depot justified itself, and had it been ready when Cowans desired it would have been of greater value still.

§ 6

We will now leave the official for a little and consider in some detail Cowans the man.

Mention has been made of his extraordinary capacity for sleep. This was of great value to him all his life, but during the War it served him best and it is not too much to say that it was one of the causes of his success, for, although he was constantly and consistently overworked, he never grew tired till towards the end, thanks to his being able to sleep almost at will.

Many famous men have possessed this characteristic. Wellington had it to a degree even more remarkable than

Cowans. Maxwell, in his *Life of Wellington*, described how the Duke, after giving orders for the retirement from Quatre Bras, lay down on the roadside, covered his face with a newspaper and fell asleep in a few moments. Then it was Wellington's custom to rise at six every morning, and his biographer estimates that he added thereby seven years of wakefulness to his life. "The greater part of those wonderful despatches, much also of his private correspondence, was penned before most of the writer's friends had left their breakfast tables. Here is the secret of his command of leisure for hunting in the Peninsula, for parties and balls which he attended so regularly, for constant presence when the House of Lords was sitting." [1]

Cowans here forms an interesting contrast to Wellington, for he reversed the process, and by working far into the night, long after his friends were in bed and asleep, he attained the same result—writing in peace, at great speed and without the constant interruptions inevitable to official hours at the War Office. During the period of the War alone it may reasonably be estimated that thus he gave his country six months extra service and, like Wellington, this was the secret of his command of leisure for those social amusements in which his active temperament found the relaxation it needed. He had trained himself never to need more than six hours' sleep, and although he seldom, if ever, went to bed before two, he could always sleep like a top (as he put it) till eight, and was always at the office however early he was wanted in the morning.

Whenever he could during the War he got away from London for the week-end, but he never liked to go far. Very often he went to his old friends, Sir Arthur and Lady Paget, at Kingston Hill, and occasionally he combined official duties on Salisbury Plain with brief visits to Lord and Lady Pembroke, at Wilton, or Sir James and Lady Pender, at Donhead. He would thoroughly enjoy a game of bridge, which he played indifferently. Or he

[1] *Op. cit.*, ii. 381.

would go to Cooden and play golf. He had trained a great friend, a terrier, to retrieve his lost balls, and his handicap can be measured by the fact that the terrier was kept fully employed.

During the last days of March and the first ten days of April numbers of drafts were rushed through Southampton, Folkestone and Dover to France, with great smoothness and success. It was the period of what came to be known as "The Big Push," and it meant a great deal of extra hard work for Cowans, added, as it of course was, to the anxiety suffered by everyone who knew how critical things were. The Germans were doing their utmost to force a decision before the full weight of the United States troops began to tell.

In June, Cowans was paid a compliment he much appreciated by being appointed to succeed Major-General A. L. Emerson as Colonel of the Gloucestershire Regiment.

In August he was very unwell and went into hospital for a short rest.

We are nearing the end of the story of this aspect of the European War, and it seems a fitting moment at which again to quote a few appreciations and estimates of his later work.

Throughout, the endeavour has been to let him be seen not only through the eyes of friends, but through those of brother-soldiers who, from first-hand knowledge and experience, were in a position truly to appreciate the man and his work. Speaking of England, General Pitcairn Campbell—who has so often been accurately described as "the best-loved man in the British Army"—says:

"About 1880 the Rifle Brigade were lucky enough to receive three young officers who all became famous and did much for their country in after life; they were Henry Wilson, Jack Cowans and Charles à Court Repington. From the moment he joined, Henry Wilson took his profession very seriously and was always a worker, and we all know what fame he attained and how much he did for his country.

"The other two looked upon soldiering from a different point of view and enjoyed life thoroughly for the first six or seven years of their service, and then Jack Cowans began to work and look upon the Army as a profession. I knew him intimately during, more or less, all his soldiering career; he was a member of my club and it was always such a pleasure to meet him. He always had some good story to tell, generally a new one, and the way he told it was of the best, and after being in his company one went away happy with a pleasant reminiscence.

"I was personally brought much in touch with him during the late War when I was Commander-in-Chief of the Southern, and later of the Western, Command.

"The work he got through was enormous but he never appeared to be anxious or worried; and his personality in dealing with all those he came in contact with was quite wonderful.

"The way he picked out men for certain jobs was marvellous, and before he sent anyone down to look after a department in the Command he always personally wrote and asked me if I would like to have them.

"I speak now of what I personally knew in the Southern Command where, by the end of November, 1914, there were over four hundred thousand men to feed. The feeding and comfort of these were specially looked after by Lord Astor, Sir Francis Towle, Colonel Chapman-Huston and others, and many retired officers came back and helped us in the Army Service Corps work, all details of which were watched most carefully by Jack Cowans, who kept always in close touch with me. Occasionally, I had to go up to the War Office to see about many matters and always went to see him; he quickly grasped what one wanted and was always most ready to help; nothing seemed a difficulty to him. I remember the time that the very wet weather came on and the men were nearly washed out of their tents; I telegraphed to him that I proposed to send the Divisions to various towns to be billeted; he made no difficulty but left it to us to arrange and gave us every help he could. Later,

[*By permission of the R.S.P.C.A.*

Horse and man in gas masks.

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when the huts were built, the quartering arrangements were carried out under his Department in the most pleasant and satisfactory manner, and if anything was wrong one had only to bring it to his notice to have it put right.

"The difficulties of quartering were very great, but Sir John Cowans had a most valuable assistant in my old friend General Heath, who had been the able administrator at Aldershot during the time Field-Marshal Lord Ypres commanded there.

"Before I left Salisbury I received a short memorandum from Cowans, at the end of another letter from a friend of his, saying, 'Do what you can about this when you get to the Western Command.'

"I put the letter carefully away and found it some time afterwards; this was lucky, because it became the subject of a Court of Enquiry, for which a special Act of Parliament was passed.

"There were two separate enquiries to ascertain about matters in which Cowans was thought to have interested himself. The first one was really a quarrel among ladies, of which a great deal too much was made. Letters were produced and made a lot of when they really meant little.

"The second case emanated from the first, and a certain Brigadier, who served under me, tried to prove that the letter sent by Cowans to me at Salisbury was written by a lady who was trying to get him (the Brigadier) superseded so that someone else should get the appointment.

"I mention them because Sir John Cowans was somewhat censured on the first case by the Court; I happened to see him in his office on the day that the finding was promulgated and he said that he felt that he should resign his appointment. I told him that on no account must he do this and most strongly urged him not to, and he took my advice.

"If he had resigned it would have done great harm to the Army and to his career. The whole thing blew over, but it is extraordinary to think how many who took part in the case are dead: Field-Marshal Lord Nicholson,

who presided; the lady in the case and her husband, Brigadier-General Sir Owen Thomas, Sir Charles Gill, K.C., Sir Arthur Markham, and General Sir John Cowans.

"Except in his profession, Jack Cowans was not lucky; his speculations, his small bets and small gambles generally went wrong.

"I met him abroad one summer and saw a good deal of him, always cheery and bright and ever ready with an amusing story, better told than repeated in print!

"His many friends and the Army in general were furious when the Prime Minister, in his statement in the House of Commons after the War, did not bring to notice the marvellous work and organisation performed by this remarkable man.

"His popularity with all those connected with him was very great, and when I attended his funeral—which was a wonderful one—I felt with many others present that we had all lost a very true friend."

General Campbell's observation that Cowans was unlucky in all games of chance is on the whole borne out by his career. A year or two previous to the War he had bought a lot of Calcutta Sweep tickets and gave them to his friends. As the time got near the Secretary of one of the London Clubs asked Cowans if he had any more to spare, and the reply was, "No, none to dispose of; those I have I wish to keep." The Secretary pressed the point, and to oblige him Cowans, rather unwillingly, let him have some—amongst them was the winner! Had Cowans kept it he would have won perhaps £60,000 and, as he afterwards said, probably chucked the Army. So perhaps his early racing losses in India and his missing the Calcutta Sweep by something considerably less than a short head, was not really such bad luck after all!

General Bond, who has previously been quoted, saw the Q.M.G.'s work throughout the War; his graphic and valuable account says:

"It was 1914, when war had been declared, before I came in touch with him again, this time, to serve definitely under him in the War Office.

"Lord Kitchener had long before, in 1906, said to

those in whom he confided, that if he had any control when the war with Germany should come, he would require at least three million men to begin with, but that even so the war would be of some years' duration.

"It is interesting to remember that these schemes were maturing in his mind, when the great responsibility fell to his lot.

"He knew that the scope of the Quartermaster-General's Administration in Transport and Supply would be immense, and all absorbing in its vital consequence. To relieve him as far as possible in the thousand and one cares, inevitable in the quartering, housing, billeting and hospitalling of his millions, he therefore called to his aid General Heath, an officer of great experience and of singular force of character, and me also, whose services had been so long at his disposal in the housing of troops in India.

"We received Lord Kitchener's special instructions to relieve Sir John Cowans in every way we could, to ensure his freedom for the very important duties of his charge in connection with the troops in the war-zones.

"To serve under Sir John Cowans in this way was a labour of love. Like Kitchener, he was essentially a big-minded man, who never faltered in his confidence in subordinates whom he trusted, nor ever failed to give them entire freedom of action.

"Like Kitchener, also, his interest in the work in progress never failed, and when difficulty arose requiring greater authority, he was equally accessible day or night.

"It is the fashion, even amongst men of real power and authority, to indulge in cheap sneers at the work of retired officers in the War Office, undertaken when the whole War Office Staff had gone overseas. We may, however, be forgiven, if we pride ourselves on the knowledge that a very great task was successfully carried through to the end of the War, and that the unstinted praise of Kitchener and of Cowans was our reward.

"It has been remarked that, in writing to the Press after the War, Sir John Cowans said little of his own

enormous task. To his modesty with regard to his own achievement, and to his invariable desire to give credit to those to whom he delegated responsibility, this no doubt was due, for he never would take credit if he thought it due to others.

"Needless, however, is it to say that the cause of success was his own generous delegation and equally ready support, without which the weightiest task could neither have been assumed nor completed.

"The care imposed by the application of the powers under the Defence of the Realm Regulations was alone immense, involving well-nigh impossible situations and involving the nicest decisions.

"From start to finish we had the loyal and constant support as well as the never-failing advice of our Chief. I can remember no single case of his finding fault, nor can I recall one moment in which our confidence in, and esteem for, his powerful mind and far-reaching vision slackened.

"The very fact that the friends of Jack Cowans, both female and male, were legion, and their visits incessant (often, be it said to their credit, affording invaluable help), added materially to the inroads on the time available for work, but also touched off the darkest picture with flashes of laughter, for he often passed them on to us, with notes which demanded control of facial muscles, and a semblance of earnest interest and importance.

"When the great Somme fighting was imminent, and the requisition of one hundred thousand vacant beds for prospective convoys of wounded exercised every faculty, not only in obtaining our wants, but in concealing our intention, fighting Finance authority and combating the charges of wilful extravagance that filled the papers and even agitated the House, even then there was a lighter side, and the confidence of our laughing Cavalier infected the whole of his Staff.

"Yet another side of his character, not perhaps so well-known, was his generous and very human sympathy with trouble. I remember many instances, such as the young officer who came to Simla, and got into financial difficulty. He was helped to start clear, and begin

again, with words of kindly but forceful advice which he was not likely to forget. And again one who was invalided home from India in desperately low straits of health and means. Jack arranged to have him met, treated in hospital and cared for till he could join his friends.

"Kindness and generosity were of daily occurrence with him.

"Service under his genial rule will always be a cherished memory, and I know that I echo the thoughts of all who served him when I say that we thank God for his stout heart and unfaltering confidence in times of stress.

"John Cowans remains always in my memory as a great man, of singular ability and force, with a power of inspiring affection, which was not the least of his many great qualities."

General Kiggell writes from the point of view of the soldier who was Chief-of-Staff in France from 1915 to 1918:

"Of course, our work touched at many points, but it did not bring me into such close association with him as if I had belonged to his Department. As Chief of the General Staff in France, however, I saw much of the results of his labours—on which the operations were dependent to a great extent, and judging by that, and by what I saw of him and his work at the War Office, I consider that he cannot be praised too highly for his work as Quartermaster-General throughout the War. His task was colossal and he proved fully equal to it, without, to my observation, ever showing any signs of being extended to his fullest scope. If he had been always fully extended I do not think he could have lasted through the whole War as he did, and as only a man of very exceptionable ability and character could have done in his place."

General Fowke (Lieutenant-General Sir George Fowke, K.C.B.), who was Adjutant-General in France from 1916 to the end of the War, writes:

"I of course knew Sir John Cowans well but only as a friend, and I had a great admiration for his work, which

I do not think has ever been properly appreciated. As long as supplies are forthcoming little credit seems to be attached to those responsible for providing them; it is only when anything goes wrong that a scapegoat is generally sought for. I only hope you will be able to do justice to one whose work and responsibilities can only be described as stupendous. Never was there a better fed and found Army than that in France, and the work behind the scenes must have been a triumph in the way of organisation, order and efficiency."

General Lawrence (General the Honourable Sir Herbert Lawrence, K.C.B.), who succeeded General Kiggell in France in January, 1918, says: "During the last year of the War, when, as Chief of the General Staff of the Armies in France, I came in contact with him as Quartermaster-General at the War Office, I think what struck me most about him was, first, his willingness and ability to take responsibility and, second, his capacity for choosing and using his subordinates."

Last of all, General Plumer speaks of Cowans from the standpoint of an Army Commander in the Field:

"It was fortunate for the Army and the country that Cowans was Quartermaster-General during the Great War.

"I do not suppose that an Army in the Field was ever so well supplied as ours during that four and a half years, and certainly no Head of the Supply Services has ever had to face such a formidable task or had to content with so many difficult and complex problems as Cowans had.

"His wonderful ability and power of work surmounted all difficulties, and I am sure that we who served in the Field realise that our ultimate victory was in no small measure due to him."

During 1918, Cowans had preoccupations in Greece in addition to the great events taking place in France.

From June onward our Government furnished the Greek Army with considerable supplies. It is well to describe what happened in the words of His Excellency Monsieur Demetrius Caclamanos, the Greek Envoy-Extraordinary

and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James, and a close personal friend of Monsieur Venizelos, that great Greek statesman and firm friend of England. Monsieur Caclamanos says:

"After many vicissitudes and vacillations, Greece, determined in accordance with the feeling of the overwhelming majority of the Greek people to join the Great War and range herself on the side of the democratic nations, more especially Britain and France, with whom age-long ties connected her, officially declared war in June, 1917, on Turkey, Bulgaria and the Central Empires.

"A few months before this event, M. Venizelos, giving vent to the national feeling which an insidious enemy propaganda and King Constantine's absolutist tendencies sought to throttle, had set up in Salonika the so-called 'Provisional Government.' On June 7, 1917, after it had already become evident to the entire Greek world that the policy of the alleged 'neutrality' assumed by the Athens Government had deprived it of any vestige of sympathy amongst Greece's best friends abroad, King Constantine was leaving Greece, handing over the Throne to his second son, the unfortunate young King Alexander, who a few years after met with such a tragical death as the result of a monkey bite. The Venizelos Government, which, thanks to the material and moral assistance rendered by the Allies and especially England, had already formed in Macedonia an Army sixty thousand strong, well armed and perfectly equipped, was now established at Athens as the lawful Government of a united country, under the same banner and with the same ideals.

"Being then in Russia as Minister for Greece, I had been informed as early as the end of 1917 that the Greek Government, desirous of establishing close connection between the Greek Army and the English Military services in so far as it concerned the revictualling and the general supplies of the Army, which was to be gradually increased to two hundred and fifty thousand men—a fact later accomplished—was calling upon me to come to London and place myself at the head of this service. For reasons quite independent of my will,

namely, the cutting of Russian communications, necessitated by the Finnish Red Revolution, my arrival was delayed by six whole months. At last, in May, 1918, I managed to get as far as Murmansk, in order to reach Sweden, and I arrived in London in June, when I immediately applied myself to the task assigned to me of securing the revictualling of the Greek Army, already in the process of formation, and of supplying also food for the Hellenic populations who had been suffering awful privations and hardships owing to the reckless German submarine blockade.

"The services of which I was in charge found themselves already in complete touch with the International Commission of Supplies and with the British War Office.

"Sir John Cowans was in charge of these services at the War Office, as Quartermaster-General. I do not think I had the honour of meeting him personally, except for etiquette purposes, but my admiration was at once aroused by the generosity of the British War Office and its whole organisation in granting to Greece all she needed to prepare her Army. Few at that time believed in the possibility of forming such an Army. Mistrust was rather general. Thanks, however, to the miraculous influence of M. Venizelos on the one hand, and to the sympathetic, willing and unabating support of the British Government on the other, this Army was brought into being soon enough to enable it to take part in the general offensive of the summer of 1918, during which it particularly co-operated with the British troops in Macedonia.

"General Milne (General Sir George Milne, G.C.M.G.), the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces on the Macedonian Front, under whose direct command the Greek Forces were acting, did later on formally express his appreciation of the Greek Army. His testimony is remaining, and will remain, among the most treasured remembrances of the Greek Army. Greece, following up the traditional friendship towards England and France —and tradition in the policy of nations is but the idealisation of their own interests—acquitted herself manfully

and with devotion and self-abnegation. In many a spot British blood was mingled with Greek blood and its noble libations consecrated new, closer bonds.

"What made fruitful this sacrifice, followed as it was by the collapse of the enemy front in the Near East, was the noiseless, unostentatious, yet constant and inestimable assistance rendered by the British Government Home Services to the fighting Greek troops in Macedonia. The administration under General Sir John Cowans gained a well-earned gratitude from Greece. And I am glad to be able to give expression to it here in the Memoir devoted to the memory of Sir John Cowans, in the name of the Greek people and of the Greek Army which took an honourable, yet not generally recognised, part in the common victory."

§ 7

It might be thought that in 1918 the Q.M.G.'s difficulties at home would have almost completely disappeared, but it was not so. Throughout the closing stages of the War the problem of accommodation pressed upon Cowans even harder than it had done earlier.

"During 1918," he wrote, "the work of providing quartering for the troops was one of great difficulty and at times of very serious anxiety. There were on an average over one and three-quarter million of troops and labour formations still to be dealt with in the country, and, besides this, the hospital population."

At the beginning of the year the resources were strained enough, but "during the early part of the summer of 1918, when the pressure in France reached its height, at one time demands arrived from General Headquarters, British Forces in France, that accommodation should be held in readiness for the evacuation of a hundred and twenty-five thousand wounded from their hospitals, sixty-five thousand prisoners of war, and the whole of the Third Echelon and its records and pay offices, and schemes were accordingly prepared to meet these emergency measures, camps being actually prepared for

the prisoners, of whom sixteen thousand at once came over. There was also a question of temporarily accommodating the British population from Paris, and considerable correspondence was involved, and measures were taken to meet the case."

Cowans knew well enough at the time that these demands were no "scare" measures, and the strain upon him was almost as great as if it had been necessary to put the schemes prepared into practice—and how nearly that was necessary is now a matter of history. Even when the tide of war, as Cowans well called it, turned, there was no slackening of the tension for him, for the wounded and the prisoners came pouring in from France and Flanders. At one time in October six thousand wounded were being sent over daily, while the available beds fell as low as three thousand, seven hundred.

Cowans claimed, therefore, that "though throughout the War there was sufficient provision for all the needs of the wounded and sick, provision was never in excess of requirements, and at the final stage just sufficient for the daily needs."

These remarks might well be applied to the quartering arrangements in general. Provision was certainly never "in excess of requirements," but one of the outstanding features of Cowans's career was the manner in which, by one means and another, he managed to meet the demands for accommodation made upon him from so many quarters, for so many purposes, and for so great a length of time.

The spring of the year had been, as we have seen, the most trying period of the whole war. Cowans was far from well, but declined to give in or take a rest, although he was forced to do so in the early autumn. Had he done so earlier, everything might have turned out differently; but it is idle speculating.

In February, General Robertson resigned the appointment of Chief of the Imperial General Staff amidst many uncomfortable, indeed sinister, rumours and conjectures. Sir Henry Wilson became his successor, and March saw us immersed in the first (1918) Battle of the Somme.

WINDSOR CASTLE.

Soldiers of the United States, the people of the British Isles welcome you on your way to take your stand beside the armies of many Nations now fighting in the Old World the great battle for human freedom.
The Allies will gain new heart & spirit in your company.
I wish that I could shake the hand of each one of you & bid you God speed on your mission.

George R.I.

April. 1918.

Historic greeting from His Majesty King George V., handed to every American soldier who landed in this country.

LIBRARY OF THE

On March 26 the famous Doullens Agreement was signed, Lord Milner (the Viscount Milner, K.G.) and Sir Henry Wilson being present; Foch was appointed Generalissimo, and unity of command was at last attained during the most critical and fate-filled hours of the War. On April 9 the Germans captured Neuve Chapelle, and the next day the third Military Service Act was passed, raising the military age to fifty, and conscription was extended to Ireland.

Two days later, Haig issued to the troops in France his unforgettable " Backs to the Wall " order, and the world realised that the very existence of the British Empire hung in the balance.

In April, Lord Derby resigned and was succeeded by Lord Milner as Secretary of State for War. In view of the important part Lord Milner had taken in bringing about Allied Unity of Command, his consequent familiarity with all the Chiefs of the Allied Armies and his general knowledge of the situation in France, his appointment was a particularly opportune one. During the summer, American troops appeared on the Italian Front as well as in France. We fought the second and third battles of the Aisne, the fourth battle of Champagne, the second battle of the Marne, the battles of Amiens and Montdidier.

In mid-August the British advance began with the second battle of the Somme and the battle of Albert, and the second battle of Arras commenced with the battle of the Scarpe. In September with Havrincourt the terrible struggles of the Hindenburg Line were under way and Flanders Ridges and Ypres (1918) were fought.

§ 8

On September 30 the first outward sign of the coming of disaster to Germany was given to the world when Bulgaria signed an Armistice with the Entente Powers. A week later the German and Austro-Hungarian Governments proposed an Armistice to President Wilson, a course which they no doubt thought would annoy the

Allies and which they at any rate preferred to that of approaching France or Great Britain direct. On October 27, Austria asked Italy for an Armistice; Ludendorff resigned, and three days later Turkey also signed an Armistice with the Entente. On November 4, Austria-Hungary did likewise; and on the 5th, less than one week before the Armistice, Marshal Foch was placed in supreme strategical direction of all the forces operating against Germany on all fronts. Three days later the German Armistice Delegates arrived at Allied G.H.Q. On the 9th a revolution broke out in Berlin and the German Emperor hurriedly and secretly crossed the frontier into Holland, there to end his days in an obscurity from which it would have been well for the world had he never emerged.

On November 11 Mons was retaken by the British Forces; the Armistice was signed, and hostilities ceased at 11 a.m.

Leaving out all he had done in the way of preparation, and setting aside the despatch of the Old Contemptibles, from Mons 1914 to Mons 1918 Cowans had carried out a task which it is difficult to appraise or measure, for the simple reason that there is nothing in history to which it is even faintly comparable in magnitude.

CHAPTER VI

1919

Demobilisation—Tommy's dream of roses in December shattered —Cases of chronic Baseitis firmly dealt with—Fine work of the Y.M.C.A.—Sir Arthur Yapp describes Cowans's warm support—Cowans returns thanks to the Y.M.C.A. on behalf of the Tommy—The development of Army agriculture—Sir Frederick Keeble's account—Spreads to every theatre of War—Its psychological value—Lord Harcourt, chairman—The invaluable assistance of Professor Keeble and Colonel Verney—Cowans gets value for his money—Salvage in France develops after the Armistice—Major Geoffrey Brown's description of how the battle areas were cleared—Cowans becomes the country's greatest seller—Cutting down contracts—Difficulties not ended with the Armistice—The sale of stores—The activities of the Disposals Board—Large sums realised from sale of animals—Rich harvest due to Cowans's business acumen—The strain on the Royal Army Veterinary Corps—Quartering problem more acute than ever—Increased demobilisation eases the situation—Hut disposals—Canteens—The Commanding Officer who bought a motor-bus from Regimental funds—The Navy and Army Canteen Board —The United Services Fund formed to administer the enormous canteen profits—Lord Byng becomes Chairman of the Council of Management—The policy and work of the Fund—The results accomplished.

WHEN the Armistice was signed on November 11, nearly every Tommy in France had visions of spending Christmas joyously at home. They seemed to think all they had to do was simply to ground arms and shake the dust of France and Flanders for ever from their feet.

They visualised:

> A nice hot bottle in a nice warm bed,
> A nice fat pillow for a poor tired head,
> And ro-o-ses round the door;

and whatever else it was the popular song promised them. There was, therefore, a good deal of grousing when it was discovered that for the bulk of them there would be no roses in December at home that year. Staff Officers were sent round to explain in lectures why the coming of the magic carpet was delayed. They had little trouble in doing so near the front lines, but here and there, at the Bases, there were isolated cases of chronic Baseitis which had firmly to be dealt with—and they were.

The machinery of demobilisation at the War Office was well in hand, and, once it got started, the whole thing went automatically. There were hitches caused, for the most part, by the Government changing its mind about which classes of men they wanted next released.

There was a steady stream of men into all the ports from France. On March 9, 1919, for example, the largest number disembarked in one day passed through Southampton. The total was five hundred and forty-three officers and ten thousand, six hundred and forty men. This was one hundred and fifteen more officers and one hundred and ninety more men than had been embarked on August 26, 1914.

§ 2

It will be necessary in this chapter to give a brief account of some activities which were either supernumerary like the Y.M.C.A.,[1] or which, although started earlier, only reached their full development after the War, such as Salvage, Disposals and the invaluable work of the Army Agricultural Committee.

[1] The Q.M.G. was well aware of the administrative difficulties that would arise out of supporting the work of voluntary organisations in the Field, but at the wish of, and with the support of, Mr. Asquith, decided that they must be overcome.

The following brief and modest account of the fine work of the Y.M.C.A. is from the pen of Sir Arthur Yapp:

"So far as I can remember, the late Sir John Cowans only on one occasion appeared on a Y.M.C.A. platform during the War. It was 1916, when he spared two or three hours from his busy life at the War Office to open a new Red Triangle Club at Esher; but he was always ready to help us behind the scenes, and I often saw him in his office, for, as Q.M.G., he held the key to many locks that the Y.M.C.A. wanted to get unfastened.

"As a matter of fact, Sir John was one of the first soldiers to realise the benefit the Y.M.C.A. would be to our soldiers in France, and through him we had to negotiate for the passes and permits required for our personnel. British Y.M.C.A. workers never received commissions as did those working with the Colonial troops, and it was something quite new to get permission for civilians who were not camouflaged by military uniform or rank to accompany the troops to France or Flanders. We appreciated even more his good offices in securing the permission that enabled us to send ladies as workers to the Y.M.C.A. huts in France. We were told there were already far too many women over there, but when he was satisfied with our assurances he secured the requisite permission, and altogether one thousand, two hundred and sixty-nine ladies of the Red Triangle went out before the Armistice, and without their help it would have been impossible for us to have carried on our ever-increasing and ever-expanding work.

"It was to Sir John Cowans that we were indebted for the permit to send out the Lena Ashwell Concert Parties that proved such a brilliant success. It was to him we had to go in our difficulties concerning transport and personnel. As the food conditions became more difficult owing to the U-boat menace, we had to go to him for permits for the supplies we needed and get him to put in a word for us with the Ministry of Food.

"When, in 1916, we sent out the ss. *Nero* laden with nearly eleven thousand pounds' worth of canteen supplies for the Dardanelles we had to go to him first.

He was the genial autocrat who controlled, in a measure at any rate, the output of motor-cars destined directly or indirectly for the use of the Army, and we could procure neither a Vauxhall nor a Ford without his consent. I never went to see him except to ask a favour or concession of some kind or another, and he never refused my request if in his power to grant it.

"Ever since those early days when the Y.M.C.A. first entered the old Volunteer Camps it has been a running fight—on quite friendly lines for the most part—between the Association and the Canteens. The latter always desired a monopoly as far as the sale of refreshments was concerned, whereas for the sake of the men we always insisted on our right to sell at popular prices tea, coffee and other similar things. As the War proceeded this old difficulty asserted itself again, and Sir John, as Q.M.G., had no easy task in seeking to see fair play between the official and the voluntary bodies. Many were the animated and anxious discussions that took place in his office. When the two points of view appeared irreconcilable it was he who decided, with our concurrence, to refer the whole question to the Secretary of State for decision.

"Before a conference could be held Lord Kitchener left for the Dardanelles, and Mr. Asquith, the then Premier, took over his duties temporarily. Sir John Cowans arranged the conference that took place in 1915 at No. 10, Downing Street and which resulted in the complete vindication of our claim that the Y.M.C.A., working entirely in the interests of the troops and spending its profits on extending its Army service, should not be taxed by any rebate payment to regimental funds.

"To me, Sir John Cowans, like all other officers holding high office with whom I came in contact during the War, was unfailingly courteous and sympathetic. He always impressed me as a strong man who knew his job and who had the highest interests of the soldiers at heart."

The Q.M.G.'s sense of the value of the work of the Y.M.C.A. can be given in his own words. Speaking at

the opening of the Esher Hut in 1916, in the presence of Her late Royal Highness the Duchess of Albany, he said:

"Since the beginning of the War I have been watching the working of the Y.M.C.A. and am conversant with all they have been doing.

"Personally I return thanks for the men myself. I have to look after the health and welfare of our men at home and abroad. The help the Y.M.C.A. has given throughout was received most thankfully and has been extraordinarily successful.

"At the beginning of the War, when we first embarked in France, there were no canteens of any sort, but the Y.M.C.A. filled the gap and jumped in and did splendidly from the first.

"The Y.M.C.A. can start them easier than the Government can; Mr. Yapp can get money out of the people easier than I can out of the Treasury. Half the huts wouldn't have been erected by now if we had had to wait for the Treasury. They make their institutions so much brighter and more attractive than we can do, besides providing a place for the men to meet their friends. One very great thing, they invite men of all denominations.

"Mr. Yapp has shown me a letter from Sir John French, a most laudatory letter on the whole of the working of the Y.M.C.A. in France. This is borne out by what I have heard throughout.

"Your Royal Highness has been so good as to take charge of this hut from the beginning of the War. If I may venture to say so, all the work Your Royal Highness has done for the Y.M.C.A. has been most thoroughly done."

§ 3

Although it was not till January, 1918, that Lord Radnor (Brigadier-General the Earl of Radnor, C.I.E.) assumed duty as Director of Agricultural Production for the Armies in France, the growing of food and vegetables by units for their own use and for sale had begun in a

tentative way in England as early as 1915. Some units, such as Convalescent Depots, were more favourably situated for the purpose than others, as activities of this nature were, of course, never allowed to interfere with the rapid training of the troops.

In the Southern Command, which was perhaps particularly well situated for the purpose owing to the contiguity of Agricultural communities, the matter engaged attention at a very early period of the War. In the autumn of 1915 it was engaging the attention of the Commander-in-Chief (General Pitcairn Campbell) and the Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services. In the spring of 1915, manure in immense quantities was being put on rail at Bulford and sold at a shilling a ton to farmers all over Wiltshire, Dorsetshire and Hampshire. Not only were the farmers benefited and food supplies increased, but the difficulty units had in disposing of large quantities of unhealthy matter was simplified.

The real difficulty was the use of railway trucks, and the Southern Railway officials and Mr. Samuel James Larcombe, the indefatigable station-master at Salisbury, rendered all the assistance possible, as did Lieutenant-Colonel H. W. Perkins, O.B.E., Deputy-Director of Railway Transport in the Southern Command. It should also be recorded that Captain Charles Bathurst, M.P. (the Lord Bledisloe, K.B.E.), who was at that time Military Secretary to General Paget, Commanding the Salisbury Training Centre, encouraged and helped the idea all he could. About one-third of the total profits made from agriculture came from the Southern Command.

By 1918 the work, which at home was organised by the Army Agricultural Committee, was in full swing not only in France, but in every theatre of war, the local Commander-in-Chief making his own arrangements and appointing his own Director.

The Home Forces had cultivated some six thousand, five hundred acres at an approximate profit of sixty-eight thousand pounds, of which thirty thousand pounds had been paid to the State, the remainder being distributed to the units concerned. This work not only

added to our food resources; it augmented the messing funds, provided valuable recreational work for semi-fit men; kept them interested in civilian pursuits and relieved for many the monotony of soldiering. Moreover, it had a psychological value in that it was productive and not destructive work.

In France the Directorate of Agriculture worked under many disadvantages, one of the greatest being the inevitable changes in the military situation. Nevertheless, production on the spot was considerable, and at least half a million pounds' worth of vegetables were grown, the saving of their transport alone being a valuable economy.

In Mesopotamia a very big scheme was engineered, and by the end of 1918 not only was the Army there self-supporting as regards vegetables, but both it and the native population were independent of imported grain. In Salonika the success of the movement was equally great; much transport was saved and some £57,000 in money.

The Treasury, the Quartermaster-General, the Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture, the Royal Air Force and the Directorate of Lands were all represented on the Army Agricultural Committee which directed and co-ordinated all these activities. Lord Harcourt [1] was chairman. He had the able assistance of such men as Professor Keeble (Professor Sir Frederick Keeble, C.B.E., F.R.S.), Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Harry Verney, Bt., D.S.O., who acted as Inspector of Army Cultivations, and it is not too much to say that without the invaluable and constant support and encouragement of the Deputy-Quartermaster-General, Sir Gerald Ellison and the indefatigable work of the Secretary to the Committee, Lieutenant-Colonel R. L. Barclay, the work could never in face of many difficulties have achieved the success it did.

As Lord Harcourt went out of his way to acknowledge, it owed much to the Chief Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services (General Landon), to his Staff at the

[1] Lewis, first Viscount Harcourt. Died 1922.

War Office, and to the Inspectors of Quartermaster-General's Services in the various Commands.

Sir Frederick Keeble, who considers the War Office organisation "the most remarkable achievement of the War," is responsible for the following vivid account of the origin of the Army Agricultural Committee:

"The formation of the Army Agricultural Committee arose out of a meeting at the War Office. Sir Arthur Lee (now Viscount Lee of Fareham, G.B.E.), accompanied by myself and Mr. Wintour (Mr. Ulick Fitzgerald Wintour, C.B.) of the Ministry of Food, met Sir John Cowans to tell him of the serious outlook with regard to food supplies and to say that it was difficult to see how—owing partly to financial reasons and partly to submarines—the Army food supply could be maintained. This was, I think, late in 1916. We were shown into Cowans's room and, pushing up his glasses over his forehead, he glared at us. Wintour spoke for a couple of minutes, and Lee for about the same time. 'Well,' said Cowans, 'what do you want to do?' 'We want the Army—already doing a great deal in food production—to do more.' 'Very well—you,' looking at General Ellison and at me, 'you had better go to General Headquarters in France and tell them. You can get there by to-morrow evening.'

"Off we went. General Ellison and I crossed the next morning and reached G.H.Q. in the evening. It took us about a week to get the lines of organisation agreed upon. Man-power was very scarce but General Haig recognised the necessity of doing something on a large scale. On our way back I suggested to General Ellison that there should be formed an Army Agricultural Committee. I got separated from Ellison at Boulogne and missed the boat and spent a night listening to bombs. When I got to London I learned that the idea of an Army Agricultural Committee had been adopted and that the late Lord Harcourt was to be Chairman, General Ellison a member, and Major Barclay, Secretary.

"In the course of a day or two the Committee held its first meeting and continued to meet regularly for the

next year or so. After the Armistice it had large ideas of a permanent organisation for encouraging the art of cultivation in the Army; but . . . economy killed all that, and the brilliant improvisation, due essentially to Cowans's marvellous flair for important things, will have to be repeated on the next occasion—if, as is not likely, there is a Cowans to appreciate simply and finally the need for it.

"A great man, chary of praise but with amazing swiftness of apprehension. In the midst of immense preoccupations, dealing with large affairs, Cowans showed that rare quality of greatness in seizing an idea, weighing it swiftly, accepting it, and ensuring its being carried out.

"The meeting just described is the only one of the many I attended during the War when not a superfluous word was spoken. He listened, appreciated the argument, agreed to the proposal, and went on with his other business knowing that Ellison would see to the rest."

§ 4

Cowans has been accused both in his official and private life of having been extravagant. The son of John Cowans of Carlisle could never be that. It is true that privately and publicly he spent money freely if there was no other way of getting what he wanted, but there was in him something that demanded an equivalent return for any money he spent. Any fool can save, but it takes a very wise person to economise. By never losing sight of this basic fact he never made a mistake. The Government of India, for instance, saved money on its pre-War policy; it continued that policy even after it was committed to a very important and difficult task in Mesopotamia, but the results cannot be described as economical. In war it is results and not expenditure that count.

At the same time Cowans never from the very beginning shirked facing the fact that in a war of supplies it is the last shipload of food that tells. He knew that in

a vast, improvised army, without experienced officers and non-commissioned officers and where speedy training was the first objective, waste was bound to occur. Hence the appointment of his Inspectors of Quartermaster-General's Services as early as the spring of 1915.

Although fully alive to the importance of economy and the conservation of our supplies, he had no illusions as to the small amount of credit he or anyone else was likely to receive for such efforts. It is an interesting paradox that mankind has always made much of great destroyers like Attila and Napoleon, and little of great conservers like Newton or Kelvin. Cowans once said to one of his Inspectors, who hinted that his efforts were not sufficiently appreciated by his Command Headquarters, that it was idle to expect anything else. "We have all known," he said, "of scores of fellows who have been lavishly rewarded for spending money, but who ever heard of a soldier who had received promotions or rewards merely because he saved." His own career illustrated this, because, of all who have written about his war work, everyone mentions that he spent two and a half million a day, and hardly one records what he did in the way of saving and economising.

It is pretty safe to say that every single economy introduced into the Q.M.G.'s Department throughout the War had its origin in the personal experience of one or other of the Inspectors of Q.M.G.'s Services. They saw waste and took immediate steps to remedy it, and these, if found effective, were passed on to the War Office, and quite often came to be adopted in all Commands. The Inspectors met regularly and, pooling their failures and their successes, gradually eliminated the former and increased and consolidated the latter.

The principle of Salvage, like so many other economies initiated by the Inspectors of Q.M.G.'s Services, not only saved money to the tax-payer, but, as we have seen, it reduced the demand for materials that were very often almost unattainable.

Naturally, it was towards the end of the War that the question of Salvage in France was able to receive the

same amount of attention it had long done in England, and it was not till after the Armistice that it developed into an enormous business.

General Gibb (Brigadier-General Evan Gibb, C.M.G.) was the Controller of Salvage at G.H.Q., and he accomplished a wonderful work in which he received notable assistance from Major A. L. Thompson, his Assistant-Controller. At the Headquarters of the Lines of Communication the work was in charge of Major Geoffrey M. Brown, O.B.E.

Mr. Marcosson has, with his brilliant journalistic pen, picturesquely described the Salvage Depot in Paris, but it was only one of the many to be found at all the big bases—Rouen, Havre, Calais and elsewhere. It was wonderful during the War to visit one of these, and see a mountain of what looked like shattered bits of harness or chewed-up old boots come out repaired and renewed again, to find their way back in due course to the firing-line. Incidentally, these factories gave employment to many thousands of French women and girls, for which our Allies were truly grateful.

Before passing on to a brief review of Salvage in France we would record the fact that from the early part of 1918 till his death in November of that year, General Gibb had, as his Assistant-Director, Major Reginald O. Schwartz, M.C., of the 6th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps. Major Schwartz will long be remembered as one of the most completely unplayable "googly" bowlers South Africa ever produced, as well as being half-back for England at Rugby football.

As early as 1915, Divisional Salvage Companies had been formed in France, but they for the most part necessarily consisted of such odds and ends of unfit infantry men as could be spared. They mostly dealt with abandoned billets and the areas behind the trenches. By degrees it was impressed on all troops that it was their duty to collect salvage material even from the trench areas and hand it over to the empty transport as it went back from delivering rations. It was roughly sorted at the Divisional Salvage dump and eventually despatched to the Base,

sometimes direct, but more frequently via a Corps main dump.

In 1917 the work was properly organised, put on a permanent basis and officers definitely posted in charge of Salvage Companies. In the spring of 1917, after the Somme battle, the matter had assumed sufficient importance for a Special Salvage Area to be marked out to be cleared under direct instructions from Salvage Headquarters. The work assumed considerable porportions in 1917 and 1918.

At the Base Depots, as has been said already, the work was little short of a gigantic business. As far as possible, formations such as the Royal Army Service Corps were returned by units their damaged empties and packing materials, and these they were required to make serviceable and use over and over again.

A most important and useful work in view of the great demand for Mechanical Transport was the repair workshops which were established at Rouen, Honfleur and elsewhere. To them was sent all reparable mechanical transport to be got fit for the road again in the shortest possible time.

§ 5

Obviously it was only after the Armistice that the work of the Salvage Branch could become of supreme widespread importance in clearing the battle areas of everything that could be turned to a useful purpose. The following description of this invaluable work is from the pen of Major Geoffrey Brown, the Staff Officer in charge of Salvage on the Lines of Communication:

"The Lines of Communication Area, or, as it is more generally termed, the L. of C., is, to those who have not a first-hand knowledge of it, a mysterious place vaguely referred to as 'The Base.' To the man in the street, perhaps, it is pictured as some port or ports from which run railways to that equally vague place, 'The Front.' But it was more than this, being, in fact, a vast army of supply, which, like some gigantic octopus, stretches its

arms to the uttermost parts of France—to Cherbourg, Brest, Marseilles, the Jura; and, like that very octopus, its arms ever contracting and expanding with the needs of the military situation, now embracing the historic battlefields of Ypres and the Somme, now contenting itself with the fringe of country that skirts the sea.

"The area was divided into smaller areas, each under the administration of a commandant on whom the responsibility for salvage in that area rested. These areas were grouped into two parts, the northern and southern, and an officer was appointed to each of these groups for the purpose of giving advice and assistance to the various commandants on all questions relating to salvage; while at the Headquarters of the Lines of Communication Area an officer of the Quartermaster-General's Staff was appointed for the purpose of dealing with all questions relating to the organisation of salvage in the whole area.

"Prior to the summer of 1917 little had been done on the Lines of Communication in the way of organised salvage, apart from the return of all unserviceable stores, clothing, and so on, the collection of all fat and grease from the cookhouses, of waste paper from offices, and the sale of manure; but in May of that year a piece of slag, drawn from the incinerator at a camp at Noyelles, was found to contain a large percentage of tin and lead which had been formed from the solder used to seal the tins in which the bully beef was issued, such tins for sanitary reasons being burnt with the camp refuse.

"Experiments were then carried out in a special kiln at Etaples, under the supervision of the Staff of the Inspector of Quartermaster-General's Services, when it was found that an average of nearly one pound of solder per hundred tins could be obtained. Kilns were subsequently erected at each of the six Field fat-extracting plants, to which units in the neighbourhood returned their empty tins, with the result that by the end of March, 1918, nearly ten and a half tons of solder had been recovered. When it is remembered that the market price of this was over £180

per ton and that, after the original cost of erection of the kilns, the cost of production was negligible (in view of the fact that, owing to the amount of fat adhering to the tins, no fuel was necessary), this item represents a considerable saving.

"When the salvage organisation for the Lines of Communication was finally authorised early in 1918, the recovery of solder was one of the first items to be considered. The original six kilns in the fat-extracting plants were supplemented, and later nearly every unit, or group of units, had a kiln to which its tins were sent. As well as this increase in the number of kilns, the kilns themselves were modified, and in the summer of 1918 a new type was produced, from which as much as two pounds two ounces of solder per hundred tins could be obtained; this amount, however, being dependent on the make of tin.

"But salvage by no means contented itself with the recovery of solder; taking as its motto, 'There is no waste,' it sought its prey in other directions, pouncing down on any so-called rubbish and claiming it for its own. A heap of tins were seen rusting by the wayside, another adorning the corner of some camp garden, an unworthy end when tin plate can be detinned and tin was anything from £330 to £380 a ton!

"It is unnecessary to describe in detail the utilisation of the various by-products and materials attempted in France with varying results, among which may be mentioned the recovery of lead from the lining of tea-chests; the manufacture of curry-combs from the metal covers of soda-water bottles; the recovery of fatty substances from the waste water of laundries; of vaseline and water-glass from the waste of hydrogen factories; the manufacture of paint and glue from horses' blood; of whitewash from used calcium carbide; of Tommy's cookers from biscuit tins; the use of the wrappers of box-respirator containers in the workshops; and the not over-successful attempts to use vast quantities of sawdust and coaldust in the manufacture of briquettes to supplement the winter fuel supply.

"The main task of the Corps was the collection of stores, equipment and so on, which for some reason or another had been abandoned, or which had become the so-called property of French or Belgian inhabitants. For Tommy is often generous to a fault in the giving of 'souvenirs'; while the local inhabitants had discovered that cardigans and boots were equally useful to civilians and soldiers, that military macintosh capes were equally waterproof for fighter or worker alike, and, in one case at any rate, that a wheeled stretcher formed an excellent combined bathchair and handcart—the following anecdote being an example of this form of salvage:

"An officer whose keenness for salvage was better than his handwriting was one day motoring through a village in Northern France, when, to his horror, he observed a small French boy practising on what was obviously a Government bugle. Filled with righteous indignation he wrote to the local Salvage Officer, and in due course a Sergeant arrived at the village armed with the report. Mis-reading the somewhat illegible writing he demanded the British bicycle reported to be in the village, and it was not until he had returned in triumph with this machine that he discovered it should have been a bugle. The bugle was recovered at a later date.

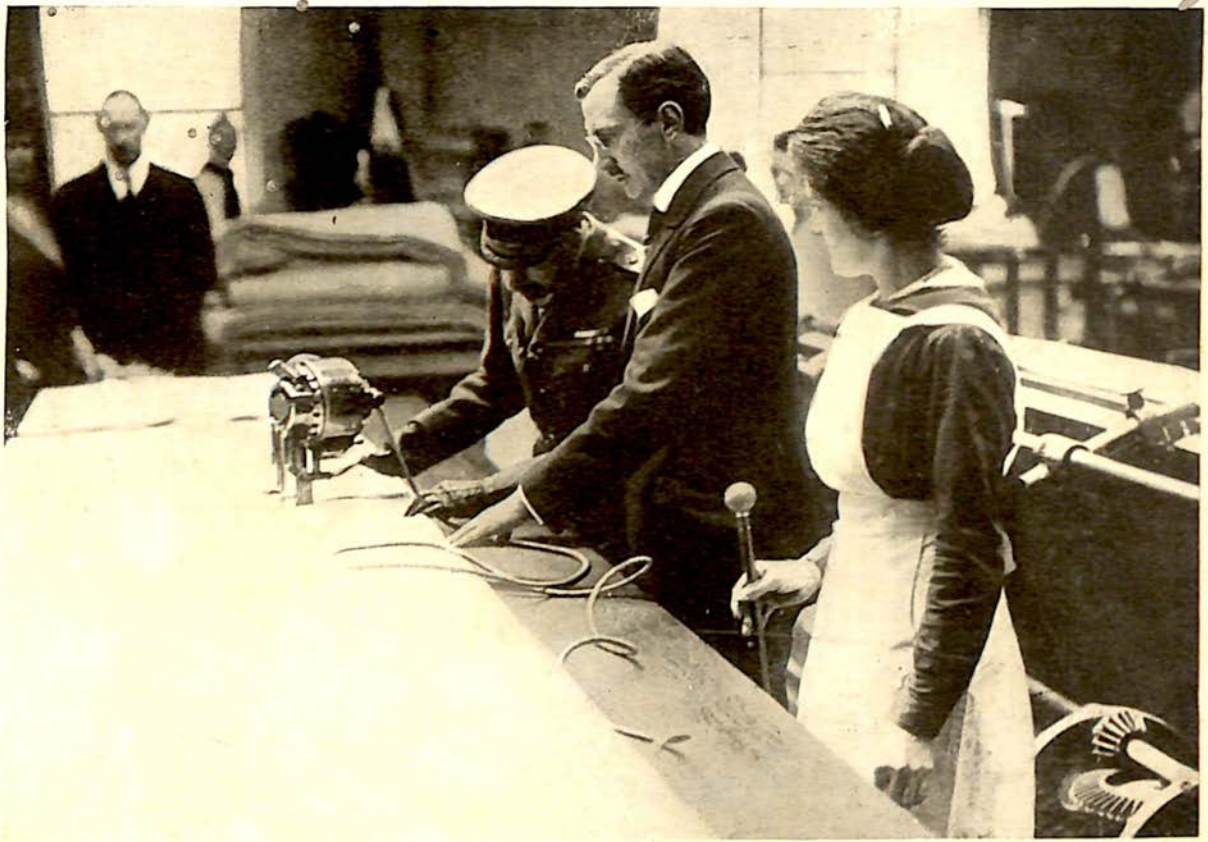
"Taking some figures at random, from returns from dumps other than those on old battlefields, we find that there were on a certain date five thousand, two hundred articles of equipment; three hundred and fifty articles of clothing; a hundred and fifty pairs of socks; a hundred and ten pairs of boots; four hundredweight of rags; a hundred articles of barrack stores; four handcarts; seventy pieces of harness; seven hundred tents; thirty-four telegraph poles and six miles of cable; several tons of scrap metal and paper; eight hundred tons of ammunition of various kinds; twenty rifles; fifty bayonets; five swords; four hundred and fifty petrol tins; six thousand, five hundred bottles, and five tons of broken glass; a hundred tons of fine ash; forty-five thousand tons of manure, as well as many other articles too numerous to mention.

"While the collection of salvage as outlined prevailed, the education of the troops with regard to the vital importance of the matter was carried out by lectures, and a considerable amount of propaganda work was effected by the issue of coloured and other posters. Nor was this work without result, as the following story shows. A battery was moving forward and had arranged a small dump of ammunition near its new position. Prior to the battery arriving this ammunition had been discovered by some ardent salvage enthusiast (trained, we hope, on the Lines of Communication), and when the battery arrived that night, its ammunition was reposing in the nearest salvage dump!"

§ 6

The terms of the Armistice had not long been arranged when Cowans, besides being the country's greatest buyer, became, through the Disposals Board, its greatest seller. This, of course, did not happen immediately; indeed, in many ways the provision of the Army's needs became a matter of even greater anxiety to Cowans than before, since many businesses desired to concentrate on manufacture for export in order that they might not be too late to recapture their foreign trade. This was particularly so with cutlery, for the abnormal demand for clasp-knives, spoons, knives and forks, and razors did not decrease until some time after the cessation of hostilities, but in view of the danger of the trade being seriously handicapped by American and Japanese competition everything was done to allow the manufacturers to go ahead with private orders and preferential treatment was given them in the release of skilled men.

Food purchases also continued to be enormous. In addition to the task of supplying the existing armies, arrangements had to be made to feed returning prisoners of war. For this purpose special staffs had to be sent to Rotterdam and Copenhagen, and army rations were put on board all vessels that carried repatriated prisoners; food was supplied at the ports of embarkation and on



[*By permission of Walter Fryer, Esq., C.B.E.*

His Majesty King George V. cutting out a soldier's tunic.

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the train journey to the reception camps, where, on arrival, what Cowans described as "an exceptionally good menu" was provided. Rations were also sent to Rotterdam and Copenhagen for the French prisoners of war, the French Authorities sending their own staffs to deal with the supplies. Then special arrangements had to be made to feed men demobilised from overseas and units at home.

As time went on, Cowans did everything possible to cut down food contracts and to dispose of surplus supplies. As he shows, at first problems of considerable difficulty arose :

"Subsequent to the signing of the Armistice, steps were taken to scrutinise all existing supply contracts with a view to avoiding the creation of unnecessary reserves of perishable supplies. This scrutiny was most searching, but the variations and changes in the rate of demobilisation made any accurate forecast extremely difficult.

"Large surplus supplies of many articles of the ration, such as biscuits, preserved meat, meat and vegetables, and pork and beans, etc., were reported to the Disposal Board of the Ministry of Munitions for disposal, as, owing to the troops objecting to eat them under peace conditions, the usual procedure of gradually consuming these surplus stocks could not be pursued. These and many other articles of supply, the stocks of which had accumulated under war conditions, were brought to the notice of the Government Departments concerned, with a view to their disposal for the relief of Allied and enemy territories or by sale."

The clothing situation was by no means eased by the Armistice, for, as demobilisation increased, vast numbers of suits and overcoats for discharged soldiers were required. Here the contractors were found willing enough to turn out the clothing, since fewer uniforms were required, but the trouble was that they had not sufficient stocks of suitable cloth on hand, and until further supplies were obtained from various sources, the position caused trouble.

Generally speaking, however, it was found possible shortly after the Armistice to reduce or cancel contracts in force, or to slow down deliveries, in view of the large stocks on hand. Purchases of saddlery and horses ceased almost entirely, and manufacturers were glad to turn again to private trade. Twelve million pounds of tea, valued at over £350,000, were handed over to the Ministry of Food, and not far short of a million proof gallons of rum was sold to the Trade at a profit of nearly £200,000.

The total sales (excluding animals) carried out by the Army at home and abroad from the Armistice until September 1, 1919, amounted to over two million pounds.

The sale of horses and other animals was even more important. In this matter Cowans's business acumen played a great part and he deserves much of the credit for the harvest reaped by the taxpayer through these disposals, which began soon after November 11.

Repatriation of horses and mules from France began in January, 1919, and during the following two months 35,000 were sent over, either on transports to Southampton, Tilbury and Hull, or by the train-ferry to Richborough, so that by the middle of March over 60,000 horses had been disposed of in the United Kingdom for just over two million pounds, while 1,500 mules fetched £25,000.

At the same time thousands of horses and mules were being sold by auction to the French and Belgian farmers and fetched an average price of £40 for horses and £44 for mules. The average for horse sales was about £7 higher in France and Belgium than in England, while for mules, which realised only £17 at home, it was £27 higher.

This was exactly what Cowans had foreseen, for both France and Belgium were depleted of draught animals and bought readily, the small farmers often paying for their purchases in gold, which they had hoarded since 1914. The result was that it was decided to dispose of as many animals as possible in France and the other theatres rather than to go to the expense of bringing them home; and the Director of Remounts made an announcement that the number likely to be available for sale in the

United Kingdom was considerably less than had originally been estimated.

Moreover, the animals that were repatriated required careful veterinary inspection, quarantine and testing for disease, and the Board of Agriculture was strongly opposed to repatriation of animals from any theatre of war except France; accordingly, surplus animals elsewhere were disposed of locally. Thus not only in every Home Command and in France and Belgium, but in every theatre of the War did the marketing of animals—horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and oxen—go forward on a stupendous scale, so that by September, 1919, over half a million had been disposed of in all theatres for a total of nearly seventeen million pounds, a sum equal to the annual expenses of the Army at the present time.

The work entailed threw a heavy burden on the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, and it was carried out in an admirable way, though, as Cowans showed, it considerably delayed demobilisation in the Corps:

"The circumstances that sales of animals in Army areas in France were all carried out through veterinary evacuating stations and mobile veterinary sections necessitating the maintenance of these units at full strength long after they had ceased to be required for dealing with sick and wounded animals. Similarly, veterinary hospitals, although they only had few patients, were carrying out sales and holding a good many animals awaiting sales; all of which delayed their break-up and many holding officers."

Demobilisation affected the personnel of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps in much the same way, and Cowans paid the Corps the following tribute to the work it performed:

"While the signing of the Armistice brought an immediate relaxation in the efforts of the fighting troops, no such lightening of their labours accrued to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. The process of demobilising the armies in the various theatres, while producing a change in its character, did not lessen, but rather increased, the volume of the work to be performed. When it is realised

that a very large percentage of the ranks of the Corps consisted of men of low medical category, and seeing that comparatively large numbers of even these men were among the first to be demobilised, the strain on the resources of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps can be appreciated."

The Armistice threw a great strain on the Directorate of Quartering for a time, for much fresh accommodation had to be found; among the arrangements made in co-operation with the Director-General of Mobilisation were those for dispersal stations, for troops awaiting demobilisation and for repatriated prisoners of war; embarkation camps for returning Dominion troops and for enemy prisoners, storage accommodation for regimental equipment, horse demobilisation requirements and much else besides.

On the signing of the Armistice, circular letters were sent to all Commands enjoining the strictest economy in all matters relating to quartering. A few days later the prisoners of war began to be repatriated from Germany. Cowans described how this necessitated the immediate clearance of barracks and huts to give them sufficient accommodation. He continued:

"Complete staffs to deal with the numbers arriving had to be arranged and accommodated, and the matter of the reception of the returning prisoners of war complicated by their exit from Germany being from ports and frontiers leading to their collection in unexpected numbers at Copenhagen, Rotterdam, the Belgian and French frontiers and in Switzerland. They were ultimately collected and disposed of at Ripon (via Leith and Hull), and at Dover and Canterbury. After the first few days, the machinery worked satisfactorily and repatriation rapidly continued."

Before the repatriation of prisoners was completed, however, a further strain was thrown on the Quartering Directorate by the start of demobilisation. Demobilisation centres were opened and every effort was made to cope with the situation which, as Cowans reported, had unexpected complications:

"A heavy strain was put on the resources of the London district by the enormous number of officers and men visiting London on leave, chiefly from the troops of Overseas Dominions in France and the United Kingdom, and from the Fleet and Army of America. The loyal co-operation of the Young Men's Christian Association, Church Army and Salvation Army enabled this difficulty to be successfully dealt with by the formation of hostels for the men, whilst the housing of the officers was materially assisted by the generous entertainment offered by many private individuals."

§ 7

One of the results of the War was the development of all manner of problems in connection with Canteen and Regimental Funds. By 1917 many battalions and units had accumulated considerable balances, both out of the rebate allowed on their purchases from the Army Canteen Committee, and by the arrangement that had been concluded by which a portion of the monies received from the sale of by-products of the men's messing was credited to the Regimental Funds of the unit. Other units had both accumulated funds, and spent them in ways which in many cases were by no means in accordance with Army precedents. One gay Commanding Officer duly bought a motor-bus with Regimental Funds to convey his men to and from their range and training-grounds!

In 1919 the Navy and Army Canteen Board took over and liquidated the affairs of the Expeditionary Force Canteens, an organisation that had been developed from modest beginnings under the extremely able direction of Colonel Frank Benson, C.B.E., till it became one of the most valuable and efficiently conducted Auxiliary Services in the field. At a later date the Navy and Army Canteen Board became the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes, which body exists at the present time and is fortunate in having Colonel Benson at its head.

It must be remembered that General S. S. Long, when he was under the Q.M.G. at the War Office, was directly

responsible for the formation of the Home and Service Canteens; this is not to say that he would have been prepared to approve of all their subsequent activities and developments.

When the canteens were originally started it was a fundamental principle of the scheme that all profits from the business should be devoted to the welfare of the soldiers.

The goods were sold at a low price, nevertheless the profits made were enormous, and in due course an organisation known as the United Services Fund had to be set up to administer them.

The original capital to start the canteens was found by means of a loan guaranteed by the Treasury to the extent of some three million pounds. This was repaid in due course. At the end of the War discussions took place at the War Office as to the best means of ensuring the profits being devoted to the ex-Service community, and more than one committee was appointed to consider this question.

It was ultimately decided to establish the United Service Fund through which the profits should be administered. General Byng (His Excellency General the Lord Byng of Vimy, G.C.B.) was asked by the Government to preside over this work, and the whole scheme and his appointment received the sanction of the Cabinet.

In accepting the position Lord Byng stipulated that he should have a free hand as regards the establishment of the necessary organisation and that the Fund should not be in any way under Government control. These two conditions were agreed to. He then approached the three leading national associations of ex-Service men, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, the Comrades of the Great War, and the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, and they agreed to appoint three representatives each to serve on the Council of Management of the Fund.

Lord Byng himself appointed three other persons, not belonging to any of these organisations, to represent the unattached men, that is, those who did not

themselves belong to these organisations. Consequently a Council of Management consisting of twelve members and Lord Byng as chairman was formed. It was necessary that the Fund should in some manner be incorporated and this was done by means of a Royal Charter. In this Charter it is laid down that the money could only be used for the benefit of ex-Service men and their dependents, but the actual purposes to which it could be applied were intentionally made very wide.

The Council of Management, when first appointed, went thoroughly into the question as to the best policy to adopt and decided first of all to assist in cases of temporary sickness amongst ex-Service men, their wives, widows and children ; next to set up special additional schemes for the benefit of children ; thirdly, it devoted money to the purpose of assisting ex-Service men's clubs which already existed, or to form new ones ; and, fourthly, to make a grant for the benefit of the women who served in the War, that is, nurses, members of the Women's Auxiliary Services and so on.

The foregoing are the four main headings covering the activities of the Fund, of which the first speaks for itself.

As regards children's schemes, ten Clearing Homes in different parts of the country have been set up into which children are received who are either orphans or living in undesirable surroundings. They are kept in these homes for periods from three months upwards and are then boarded-out with foster-parents selected and paid for by the Fund, and are subsequently visited frequently.

A special hospital to deal with cases of surgical tuberculosis in children has been built by the Fund at Ascot containing a hundred and fifty beds and meets a much-needed want. Open-air treatment is given and the hospital is fitted up on the most modern lines.

Grants for special medical treatment and convalescent treatment for children are made. There is an after-care scheme for them under which they are assisted to make a start in the world and, if necessary, grants are given for this purpose.

A special feature of the work for children is the

education scheme. Over sixty thousand pounds was spent last year (1923) on education cases, and at the time of writing over five thousand children are being dealt with. It is hardly too much to say that the Fund is prepared to help any child of an ex-Service man.

The Council of Management felt in the early days that something was due to the men who were not necessarily ill or in want and therefore organised Local Committees of the ex-Service men themselves in each locality to formulate a scheme as to how they would like what are known as their welfare grants to be expended. These grants were fixed at a lump sum for each locality on the basis of five shillings a head for every ex-Service man within the radius covered by the Local Committee. Over three thousand clubs have been assisted. In some instances Local Committees decided that the grant should be devoted to the local hospitals or for the purchase of hospital tickets, and such schemes have always been accepted and encouraged.

For the ex-Service women a committee representing all the different women's corps was formed to consider the allocation of the money, and as a result clubs have been established in several of the leading centres of the country; also residential hotels, and convalescent and holiday homes.

Arising out of the scheme for helping sick ex-Service men, holiday homes have been established where men can go on a medical certificate for rest and change of air for periods of three weeks at a time. This scheme has been taken advantage of to a very large extent. The Council of Management have recently decided to undertake a large scheme for the benefit of tuberculous ex-Service men. Grants are made for the maintenance of themselves and their families when they are not in a position to work before they go to a sanatorium, during their stay there and for a period after their discharge. A special home is being set up at Bournemouth to which they can go for a period of convalescence on leaving a sanatorium, and for periodical holidays thereafter to enable them to maintain their health.

The question as to the disposal of the Canteen profits has so often been asked that it is necessary to record these details. There is, quite naturally, diversity of opinion as to the right of the canteens to make a profit out of the soldier, but, this having been done, there can be no two opinions as to the admirable work that is now being carried on with these funds and, without doubt, the great bulk of the money will in due course benefit ex-Service men and women and their children and dependents.

Lord Haig is now the Chairman. He is assisted on the Council of Management by Lord Loch (Major-General the Lord Loch, C.B.), who is Vice-Chairman; by Mr. T. F. Lister, who had done such magnificent work for the British Legion, and by many others well known in connection with work for ex-Service men. Brigadier-General Robert Henry More, C.M.G., is an indefatigable Secretary, with Mr. C. K. Thorpe as his assistant.

The Fund has divided the country into six administrative areas, each with headquarters and an officer in charge. Its financial matters are in admirable hands. The Finance Committee, which is presided over by Major-General Guy Payn Dawney, C.B., consists of Lieutenant-Colonel R. L. Barclay, a Director of Barclay's Bank, Limited, who did invaluable work in the Q.M.G.'s Department during the War, and who has gone on working for the soldier ever since; Mr. John William Beaumont Pease, who is the Chairman of Lloyd's Bank, Limited; and Mr. F. Wise, late of Messrs. Wise, Speake and Company of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

These names are more than a guarantee that all the affairs of the Fund are in the very best hands.

CHAPTER VII

ADMINISTRATION IN PREVIOUS WARS

L'art de la guerre n'est rien sans l'art de subsister.—VAUBAN.

Why military historians neglect the vital subject of supplies—Colonel Furze quoted—Gustavus Adolphus the father of the Modern Supply System—Institutes magazines from which supply dumps are evolved—Louvois and Frederick the Great elaborate the system—Mobility of troops restricted by dependence on magazines—Frederick's quixotic consideration—His armies starve in a land of plenty—Napoleon's armies live upon the resources of invaded territory—Wellington's difficulties in the Peninsular War—Prided himself on being a first-class Commissariat Officer—Napoleon amasses stores for the invasion of Russia—The most tragic breakdown of supplies in history—Starvation ruins more armies than battles—The inefficient Commissariat in the Crimean War—Folly of trying to make war on the cheap—Disastrous results of civilian control—Kingslake quoted—Grant's well-fed army in the American Civil War—President Lincoln's simile—He surrenders in a condition of starvation—Railways in the Franco-Prussian War—The German Army well fed in spite of many difficulties—The Intendandur combines the methods of Frederick and Napoleon—Invader more likely to live successfully upon local resources than the Defender—Sir Redvers Buller creates the Army Service Corps—The South African War justifies his confidence—General Mansfield Clarke's great achievement—Lord Kitchener and Lord Methuen testify to the excellence of the food supply in South Africa—Lord Roberts praises the Transport—Cowans's task in the European War—What he accomplished—Feeding five million—Only soldiers can feed soldiers—Lord Haldane's tribute to the Administrative Services—The man who never failed.

COWANS has been called the greatest Quartermaster-General in history. There may be those to whom such a title will seem a challenge, and it may be well, therefore,

to pause here and survey briefly the various systems by which armies in the field have been provided for in other wars of modern times.

Strangely enough, it is a matter to which most writers of military history make but passing reference. As Colonel G. A. Furze truly says in his masterly work *Provisioning Armies in the Field :*

" In his desire to render his pages brilliant and alluring with descriptions of marches and battles, with exciting details of the national efforts, with the activities of political personages and sequence of events, the historian, generally speaking, does not enter into particulars on matters which refer to the maintenance of an army in the Field. Many interesting details which are so important to the military student are thus left unrecorded."

Perhaps the reason is that, if such particulars are to be given in anything more than a cursory fashion, it must be done in considerable detail to be properly intelligible. That they are infrequently so given is due either to lack of adequate material or to the historian's fear of overburdening his book with a mass of information which, he supposes, will be of interest only to the soldier.

It is possible that future historians will think differently. For in records of military campaigns, no less than in accounts of travel and exploration, the little intimate details of every day life count for much. They give life to the narrative. And surely nothing can be more intimate than the description of how the subject of a book, whether it be an army or only an individual, is fed. It may even happen that what an army had for breakfast makes as interesting reading as the tactics of a battle. More than that : it is conceivable that the former subject, though seemingly trivial, may in reality be more important than the latter, for the best generalship can do little with hungry men, and good breakfasts have perhaps won as many battles as good tactics.

Each succeeding war has shown more conclusively than its predecessor how supremely important is an efficient

Supply Service; and history proves that the armies which have been victorious, even in spite of no matter how many other obstacles, always had the odds on their side in the matter of food, and that the general who wins wars is he who does not neglect his commissariat.

This truth is no sudden discovery. Cæsar, we know, realised it, and was careful to carry with his army two to four weeks' supplies, using pack-animals as transport. But in later days there is no doubt that it came to be neglected. As Colonel Furze says again:

"There is no denying that an immense amount of misery and distress would have been avoided in the past had this vital subject received all the attention it deserved. Death by starvation and wasting away, the devastation of many rich and smiling countries, the ruin and despair of many homes, pillage, arson, murder and the most wicked outrages and excesses to which man can descend, would not have been recorded had armies been adequately provided with the necessaries of life. The first condition of human nature is to live, and by hook or by crook man will provide himself with the means to do so. As a French writer puts it: 'Alas! When one is hungry one would eat the devil, if it were possible to find him.'"

§ 2

Perhaps Gustavus Adolphus, whose constant care for the welfare of his troops was only equalled by his consideration for the inhabitants of the territory through which they fought, may be called the father of the present supply system, for it was he who instituted the method of feeding troops from central magazines, from which the modern Supply Dump has been evolved. Before his day invading armies had lived on the country they passed through, plundering almost at will. War had been made to feed war.

Gustavus, however, levied fair contributions from the population, paid fairly for such requisitions, and punished soldiers who demanded from the inhabitants more than

they were allowed by his orders. The supplies obtained by requisition were collected to form magazines, which were supplemented by the stores sold by the traders who were allowed to follow the Army—the forerunners of the modern Expeditionary Force Canteen.

Louvois, the famous War Minister of Louis XIV., elaborated the magazine system, establishing vast storehouses of food on the frontiers and, as the invading armies advanced, sent out branches to follow them. This gave the Army greater freedom of movement than it had been possible to obtain before, but, even then, so great were the difficulties of transport that troops could not go more than six or seven days beyond their magazines.

Frederick the Great improved the system still further, and, by adding two or three days to the period, increased the mobility of his troops; but he concerned himself mainly with the supply of bread, of which the Prussian soldier was allowed two pounds a day, in addition to two pounds of meat a week.

Frederick, although he increased the freedom with which his armies could move, did so always in a restricted sense. He remained dependent on his magazines, and while he emulated the excellent example of Gustavus in his consideration for the inhabitants, he went almost to quixotic lengths, and allowed his troops and horses to suffer the most terrible privations in a land of plenty rather than levy contributions from the people of the country which he was defending. So great was his respect for private property that in the retreat from Jena his starving army had to pass through a country with ample resources of every kind without being allowed to touch them, and not only did he suffer his men to come near starvation themselves, but he left the pursuing French army a vast supply of provisions and forage on which to draw.

For Napoleon had no such scruples about availing himself of anything a country offered him. He went, indeed, to the other extreme, for, his aim being always to strike swiftly, he was impatient of the fetters by which the magazine system hampered him.

As far as possible, therefore, he dispensed with magazines and lived on the resources of the invaded territory, caring little for the rights of property so long as he could attain his object, but spreading his armies over as wide an area as possible and bringing them together when he needed them to strike.

To the student of military administration, history can hardly supply a more interesting contrast than these two supply systems in operation in the same campaign: that of Frederick, considerate, moderate, working by rule of thumb, with eventual disaster to his men; that of Napoleon, ruthless and flexible, yet placing the needs of his army before all else. It was inevitable that in those days, when transport services were undeveloped, Frederick's more prudent system should be shattered when it came in contact with the ruthless methods of Napoleon.

§ 3

Massena followed his Emperor's principles in the Peninsula and suffered for it; so, to some extent, did Wellington, though previous to entering Spain without magazines, he made careful investigations as to the country's resources for supplying his army, and received from the authorities assurances (which were not fulfilled) that every needed article should be forthcoming.

This was characteristic of Wellington, for no British Commander-in-Chief ever paid more attention to the needs of his men. It was his boast that: "Many can lead troops: I can feed them." He took pains personally to master all details of the duties performed by the Commissariat, and he used to say that besides being a General he prided himself on being a first-rate Commissariat Officer. He once told his father, Lord Wellesley, that "a starving army was worse than none," and he had reason to know, for on more than one occasion during the Peninsular War the troops were reduced to the direst straits. Napier mentions that at one period the sole sustenance of men and officers was half a pound of wheat in

W. S. Brancker

March 22nd 1924

AIR VICE-MARSHAL SIR SEFTON BRANCKER.

Vol. II., p. 276.

the grain, and twice a week a few ounces of flour with a quarter of a pound of goat's flesh. Even this was procured with difficulty, for the troops had themselves to catch the animals as they ranged the hills.[1]

Wellington was faced with unending supply difficulties in the Peninsular War. What provisions he could extract from the local authorities he was always scrupulous in paying for, but he often had great trouble in obtaining the money. Then the whole of the Commissariat Department, as it was then called, was hopelessly inefficient. It was mainly staffed by civilians who had no special training in their duties, and was the subject of his repeated complaints. His presiding genius did much to improve matters, and he organised his transport and his supply columns in a manner so admirable that he prevented what might otherwise have been a disaster, employing pack-animals with the fighting troops on account of the difficult country to be traversed, carts and wagons for the carrying of stores in bulk, and boats on the Tagus and Douro.

§ 4

Wellington's task in the Peninsula, separated by sea as he was from his Home Base, was formidable enough, but Napoleon's when he came to invade Russia was even more so. History cannot show more tragic results from a breakdown of the supply system. Nor was this due to want of thought or provision on the part of the Emperor In this campaign he realised, clearly enough, that it would be impossible for his vast forces to live wholly on the country through which they were to march. He knew that success or failure would depend on the provision of food for his Army.

With this object in view, he amassed such quantities of stores as had never been dreamed of in the provision for an army. Basing his requirements on the needs of four hundred thousand men, he collected twenty million

[1] Napier's *History of the Peninsular War*, Book VIII., chap. iv.

rations of bread, the same quantity of rice, and two million measures of oats—enough to supply his men and horses for fifty days. Count Philippe de Segur describes how, for long before the expedition started, the accumulation of these vast masses of supplies near the frontier in Prussia and in Poland occupied his thoughts. No detail was too insignificant for him to neglect. Intending as he did to concentrate his army at a single point, and knowing that local resources could not give him all he needed, he created a transport service which he believed would be adequate to deal with the vast supplies he was to carry.

He left nothing to chance, and yet it was chance that beat him in the end. Under such conditions, and with such immense distances to be covered, transport, however ample, will avail nothing on bad roads, and the roads were vile. In addition to this, the wagons were heavy, the marches long ; the horses gave way under the strain and the drivers became undisciplined.

Yet for a time all went well, for at first the army lived upon the country. But Napoleon had counted on striking the blow quickly, as was his custom, and so forcing the Tsar to sue for peace. Pressing on too fast, he left his supply columns behind. The result was disaster. As he went forward he found that the Russians had destroyed everything in their retreat. Before long, instead of being able to draw upon the provisions that had been collected with such care, the troops were staving off the pangs of hunger with slices of grilled horseflesh and rye flour made into gruel with snow water or kneaded into cakes, seasoned with powder they extracted from their cartridges.

Even these privations were little compared with the return march from Moscow. By that time the supply service had broken down utterly. The troops, famished and in the midst of the bitter storms that beset the whole campaign, tore to pieces the fallen horses like packs of starving hounds, and became a terrible example of the truth of Montecululi's saying that famine is more cruel than steel and starvation has ruined more armies than has battles.

§ 5

If Napoleon's supply service failed him in spite of all his foresight and all his careful preparations, it is easy to understand that a breakdown was likely in a campaign that was undertaken with scarcely any preparation at all. Such was the state of affairs in the Crimea. The supply organisation which Wellington had started in the Peninsula had ceased to exist in 1816. For nearly forty years the country had been at peace and had become lulled into complacency. The Commissariat had to be created afresh, and for the greater part of the campaign was controlled by the Treasury, not the War Department. It was under the Commissary-General, who corresponded direct with the Treasury, but had no rank and file. As Kingslake said, in *The Invasion of the Crimea*, "When England flew to arms against Russia, she was not only without a land transport corps, but even without adequate knowledge of the huge operations required for enabling a modern army to live and move."

The object of the Treasury was to spend as little money as possible. The result of this policy proved conclusively that war cannot be made on the cheap, a truth which those who had accused Cowans of extravagance may take to heart, for the economy displayed in 1852 cost the country millions of money to repair, caused untold suffering to the troops, as well as bringing discredit upon the reputation of British arms.

There was no system, no organisation. No estimates were made for what supplies the Army would need after landing in the Crimea. The whole thing was left to chance, and Lord Raglan, the Commander-in-Chief, was expected to provide for his men largely from local resources.

There was constant shortage of fuel, so that tired men had to grub up roots to burn. The service of transports from England was imperfectly organised and there was no system in the despatch of supplies ; those which were not so pressing would arrive before others of which there was urgent need ; warm clothing for the

winter arrived when the troops were grilling under a blazing sun and it took five months for Lord Raglan to obtain a steam bakery he had demanded. Even when stores did arrive there was always a difficulty in finding parties to unload, and when unloaded there was congestion at the Base, for the transport service broke down owing to the state of the roads. In fact the Committee which was subsequently appointed to report on the war gave it as their opinion that the Administration responsible had made no provision for a winter campaign; and that the expedition had not only been planned and conducted without sufficient information, but had been conducted without sufficient care or forethought.

§ 6

If the deplorable supply arrangements in the Crimean War did nothing else, they brought home to military authorities the necessity for organising their Administrative Services with care and forethought. It is a remarkable fact that the victorious army in the American Civil War, in the Franco-German War and in the South African War was each considered to have been better fed than any other previous campaign.

The American Civil War is a particularly illuminating example of an ill-fed army opposed to one well supplied "The worst-clad and the worst-fed army, perhaps, ever mustered into service was the band of Confederate heroes who shivered and starved together on the banks of the Rapidan," wrote White, when describing the plight of the Army of Northern Virginia in the winter of 1863-64. "Rude huts of pine and oaken logs, furnished inside with beds of straw, formed the habitation of both officers and men. The soldiers were clad in garments made up of patches and fluttering strings. Very few possessed comfortable shoes. Thousands were absolutely destitute of covering for head or foot. The only complete outfits were the products of handlooms, woven by wives, mothers and

daughters, who kept brave watch, and prosecuted unmurmuring labours in the old plantation homes." [1]

Grant's Army, on the other hand, had everything it needed, so that it moved President Lincoln, when addressing the Commissioner of the Subsistence Department, to say, " Your Department we scarcely ever hear of ; it is like a well-regulated stomach : works so smoothly we are not conscious of having it." His words are particularly applicable to Cowans's Department in the European War, and to the present-day American Subsistence Department which has been so largely modelled on British lines.

§ 7

It was, however, in the Franco-German War of 1870 that the foundation was laid of the modern system of providing for armies in the Field. For the first time railways played an important part in war transport. The German Army, operating at a distance from its main source of supply, had the most difficult task, yet the results led von Moltke to state that no great Army had ever been so well fed in the Field before.

This statement was probably true, nevertheless, in spite of the extreme care and watchfulness of the German Commissariat and the efficiency of the Administrative organisation, there were periods, although of short duration, when the troops suffered from hunger.

The German Army required daily nearly half a million pounds of bread, one hundred thousand pounds of rice, over five hundred oxen, in addition to salt, coffee, sugar, spirits, cigars, and vast quantities of forage. For the transport of these supplies, rolling-stock had to be provided and, after rail-head had been left, large quantities of animals, which were found only with considerable difficulty.

The Intendandur, or German Commissariat, had evolved a combination of the systems preferred by

[1] *Life of Robert E. Lee.*

Frederick the Great and by Napoleon. That is to say, they relied on the resources of the country to supplement their own supplies, requisitions being made only by authorised persons and official receipts being given for everything taken. Here, of course, they were in a better position than the French, for they were occupying an invaded country, and as Colonel Furze well says: [1]

"Experience has demonstrated that in trusting to the resources of the theater of war for the subsistence of the troops, the invader has always a better chance of success than the defender. The latter, being bound to treat his countrymen tenderly, will stop short of threats and punishments, and cannot resort to very vigorous measures to compel the peasant to unearth the provisions he has hidden. The invader does not make any semblance of tenderness: the inhabitants are a conquered people, and as such have no claim to be treated leniently. They can be menaced in such a way as will force them sooner or later to produce some of their hidden store. It is for fear of seeing his family exposed to famine that the peasant hides his surplus provisions, and he will not part with them until he is tempted by the offer of a very remunerative price, or is constrained by very severe measures."

These words, too, may be applied, as they stand, to conditions in the European War, when the Central Powers were always the invaders and the Allies the defenders.

Yet in spite of the advantages the Germans had, in the War of 1870, of being a victorious army in a rich and well-populated country abounding with supplies of every kind, with a harvest freshly gathered and with (for those days) good communications, they were still able to supply only one-third of the army's needs by local requisition; the remainder had to be found by the Intendandur, and even so there were times when the supply services broke down. The Administrative Services of the French, on the other hand, were almost as

[1] *Provisioning Armies in the Field.*

unprepared as those of England had been on the outbreak of the Crimean War, thanks to a similar policy of parsimony. There were no reserves of stores, and the transport of each Corps had to be organised before it could take the Field. In fact, as Captain Hozier says in his *Franco-Prussian War*, "The French were organising while the Germans were marching."

§ 8

The lessons demonstrated in the Franco-German War were not lost upon our own army, though it was some time before they were applied. The Crimean War had demonstrated the drawbacks of having a Commissariat under civilian control, working for the Army but actually employed by the Treasury. Apart from the disadvantages of dual control, it was apt to place economy before efficiency, rather than combine the two in an effective manner.

Yet with certain modifications, for the most part ineffective, this system persisted until, in 1887, it was put on a military basis instead of a civilian one, and Sir Redvers Buller reorganised the whole system of feeding the Army. He created the Army Service Corps as an integral part of the Army, under the Quartermaster-General and linked Supply and Transport to work together in harmony and in co-operation with the fighting units. He paid particular attention to the status of the officers in the new Corps, and Colonel C. H. Melville, C.M.G., in his book, *General Sir Redvers Buller*, gives a clear impression of the objects he had in view:

"'I want,' he argued somewhat as follows, 'to officer my new organisation with men who have the same position and prestige as officers of the combatant branches. The officers of the new Army Service Corps must be proud of themselves and of their own Service; they must be recognised by the Army generally as part—and no unimportant part—of the Army. They must identify themselves with the Army, and the Army must identify itself

with them. This can never be the case if their military status is doubtful, or limited, so as to provoke comparison and suggest inferiority. They must have no disabilities, and a full military career must be open to them. I can see no reason why Army Service Corps officers should not look forward to the day when it shall be open to them to sit in the chair I now occupy (Q.M.G. at Headquarters).'"

Buller's reforms provoked considerable criticism at the time, as most useful reforms do, but it was to him, and to him alone, that the credit must be given for a new order of things which stood the test a few years later in the South African War and laid the foundations on which Cowans was to build when he came to fill Buller's place as Q.M.G.

As in the Franco-German War the method of supplying the South African Field Force was a compromise between drawing upon local resources and sending food from home.

The contracts for food and forage bought in South Africa were made by the officers on the spot, with the exception that the meat contracts were referred to the War Office. Arrangements were made with the South African Supply and Cold Storage Company to provide meat both fresh and frozen for a Field Force of fifty thousand men. It was necessary to have recourse to contractors, since there were no powers to requisitioning the ample supplies of cattle and sheep existing in the Colony. This Company supplied the Army with meat during the whole campaign, and the frozen meat, which was, however, confined to troops close to the lines of railway, was more appreciated than fresh, the latter being derived chiefly from old cows and worn-out trek-oxen. "The invention of cold storage which had not been previously applied in warfare," states the Report of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, "appears to have contributed much to the success of operations on a large scale." Besides one pound of meat a day the troops received twenty ounces of bread; coffee, tea or chocolate, vegetables, cheese, bacon, sugar

and salt; almost as comprehensive a diet, in fact, as in the European War.

By the end of the war over three hundred and twenty-five thousand men, and nearly the same number of horses, mules and oxen, were being fed. This was considerably less than a tenth of the number Cowans was to feed, but still the largest task of its kind Great Britain had ever undertaken at the time, yet the Royal Commission already referred to, although it commented adversely upon most of the other Departments, with the exception of the conveyance of the troops to the Cape, reported:

"The evidence shows that both in method of distribution and in quality the supply of food was one of the most successful features of the South African War. This success was more striking in view of the great area over which the operations extended, of the fact that between the frontier of Cape Colony and Pretoria there was only a single line of railway and that this line was frequently cut, and the fact that, especially towards the end of the campaign, the forces were much scattered and numerous columns were operating in every direction . . . the demands made on the War Office from the seat of war were admirably met by the officials there, and the method of receiving and distributing supplies in South Africa appears to have been excellent. If on a few occasions there was a shortage of rations, this was due to peculiar circumstances in the operations, such as the movements between the Modder River and Bloemfontein, looked at in connection with the loss of great convoys and, of course, the siege of Ladysmith."

This reasoned conclusion, given by a Committee to which no suspicion or any desire to whitewash can be attached was formed on the evidence of numerous important witnesses, all of whom testified to the excellence of the arrangements for the feeding of the men. Lord Kitchener, giving evidence, said: "I consider that the soldier was better fed than in any previous campaign. Complaints were few and far between, and the majority were of a trivial nature, which speaks well for the sufficiency of the rations, and the general quality of the food

supplied"; while Lord Methuen declared: "I never recollect the food supply being better, or so good, as it was in this campaign; from the beginning to the end I have not one word to say against it."

Animals did not fare so well as the troops, however, for the difficulties in the distribution of the forage were very great and, although every effort was made to live on the country as far as possible, local resources were not enough, so that horses and mules often went short. Of the transport itself it is unnecessary to speak in detail here; it is enough to say that, had it not been for the transport, both pack and wagons (there was, of course, no mechanical transport), the Supply Service could not have been praised as it was. Lord Roberts stated that while he was in command no mishaps occurred, nor had any operations to be abandoned or postponed owing to transport being inadequate or inefficient.

The feeding of the Field Force in South Africa was, therefore, undoubtedly a great achievement and there can be little doubt that Cowans, who, it will be remembered, was at the War Office throughout the campaign, though not immediately connected with supplies, nevertheless was in close touch with the Branch of his Department that dealt with them, and certainly obtained much insight and first-hand knowledge that were to be of immense value to him when the time came.

§ 9

From this brief account of other supply services in the Field during three centuries, it will be seen that to acclaim Cowans the greatest Q.M.G. in history is not extravagant. Gustavus Adolphus instituted magazines, but could not organise them on a scale that would give his troops the mobility they required; Frederick the Great did not make the most of the resources that were at his disposal; Wellington was hampered by local conditions and lack of money; Napoleon's supply service broke down utterly when he most needed it, not

for want of forethought, it is true, but largely because he had for once miscalculated on his power to bring hostilities to a swift issue.

These, too, were leaders first and organisers afterwards. They were Commanders-in-Chief, not Quartermaster-Generals, and although they played both parts, the peculiar genius of each was on a different, indeed a higher, plane than that of Cowans. It would be idle to compare him with them. Of their Chief Commissariat officers we know little; we can only judge by results.

It has been shown that the Commissariat Department in the Crimean War failed utterly, and, by the time of the South African War, the importance of the supply services had been realised, with the result that the troops were well fed and cared for in the Field. That was undoubtedly a great accomplishment, for which praise is due to General Mansfield Clarke. Yet any soldier who fought in both wars would readily assert that he was better fed in France than in South Africa, and, moreover, although many difficulties had to be overcome in the South African War, they were not a tithe of those which confronted Cowans during those fateful years when he harnessed the resources of the whole Empire, and of the United States as well, and even then found them barely sufficient for his needs.

It is true he had many advantages which had been lacking in previous campaigns. In the decade that followed the South African War, science had moved more rapidly than ever before, so that he had the benefits of economic and mechanical inventions, the most important of which was motor transport. Money, too, he had for the asking, and an efficient service; without either he must have failed. For all that, a man may have great advantages, unusual facilities, boundless opportunities, and yet not use them rightly. Cowans had all these things and he used them wisely. For the task for which it had been his duty to prepare, he was ready when the time came: and the Expeditionary Force reached its war stations, equipped with all it needed, without a hitch. For the far greater task that faced

him afterwards he improvised—and his improvisation was even more successful than his preparation. He elaborated and developed the Administrative Services to a degree that would have been considered impossible in July, 1914.

Never once was he found unready. The time came when he was feeding over five million men and nearly a million animals, not in one country overseas, but scattered over the earth in Expeditionary Forces, to say nothing of those in the United Kingdom and in garrisons abroad. Not only did he feed these troops, and feed them as no soldiers had ever been fed before, but he housed them, equipped them, clothed them and found them horses, ransacking the world that their lightest need might not be unfulfilled.

Besides giving them the necessaries of life, he schemed that those bitter years of fighting might be lightened for them in some measure by both luxuries and amusements. For him there was no resting-time. No break ever came in the Army's impelling needs. To meet them he was spending two and a half millions every day, and while he spent he never tired of devising means to save; money he saved, and food and clothing; more important still, he saved men, by allowing women to have their share in the final victory.

He proved, beyond all question, that only soldiers can feed soldiers; and it is not likely now that the British Army will ever have to rely upon the cheeseparing methods of a civilian commissariat, such as well-nigh brought it to disaster in the Crimean War. The Administrative Services he directed, with the loyal devotion of those who worked with him, never once broke down: every Commander-in-Chief paid his tribute to them and granted that without them his efforts would have availed but little, and they moved the greatest British War Minister of our time to speak of them in these words of unstinted praise:

"Much of what we did owe for the excellence of the Expeditionary Force, such as it was in point of size, and much of what we have since owed for the excellence

of the great armies that we subsequently raised was due to the unbroken work of the fine Administrative Staff, developed in those days, to which I have already referred. I often regret that when the nation gave its thanks through Parliament to the Army, the splendid contribution made by those who prepared the Administrative Services was not adequately recognised. But this arose from the old British tradition under which fighting and administration were not distinguished as being quite separate and yet equally essential for fighting. The public had not got into its head the reality of the process of defining the two different functions with precision, and of confiding them to different sets of officers differently trained." [1]

The Q.M.G. was the fountain-head. Had he failed, great would have been the measure of his blame; since he succeeded, incomparably succeeded, his must be the highest honour. If ever soldiers went hungry in the European War, and they rarely did, it is safe to say that it was through no fault of Cowans. But it was he who so served the Armies that, when the time came, they could mount up to victory with wings as eagles; until victory was achieved it was his lasting heed that the soldiers might run and not be weary, and that they might walk and not faint.

[1] Lord Haldane's *Before the War*, p. 176.

CHAPTER VIII

1919-1921

We are men, and godhead is far, and it shall not be
That men as gods without flaw shall travel to death,
Yet a rumour of stars is with us, the light of a sea
No ship has ventured. . . .

—JOHN DRINKWATER.

Promoted full General—Becomes associated with important oil group—Business men appreciate his achievements—Leaves the War Office—Retirement facilitated by Mr. Winston Churchill—Presented with the freedom of his native city—His tribute at Carlisle to the Administrative Services—Describes their exclusion from the Thanks of Parliament as alarming—His appreciation of United States recognition—Quotes General Pershing's letter—Tribute to Lord Kitchener—An operation becomes necessary—Goes to the South of France—Removed to a nursing home at Mentone—The great change—Enters Roman Catholic Church—Death—His decorations sold—Chivalry of the anonymous buyer—The Question of Lady Cowans's pension—Suggestion for a permanent memorial of Cowans.

IN the (1919) New Year Honours Cowans was promoted a full General, not a very remarkable acknowledgment of his services when it is remembered that he had been a Lieutenant-General for over three years. On March 20, he in common with a great number of others who had given distinguished service in the War, was awarded the Grand Cross of the Bath (Military Division). His C.B., oddly enough, had been only a Civil one as in the absence of active service he was not qualified for the Military Division.

For some time after the Armistice he had toyed with the idea of a Colonial Governorship, but the prospect did not really appeal to him and, disgusted with the way the Government had ignored the Administrative Services and himself as their head, he resolved after some consideration to accept an attractive offer to enter upon a business career.

The important oil group with which Cowans became associated was fortunate in securing him. It was a very astute business move and it emphasised the fact that if the Prime Minister and the Government did not appreciate what Cowans had done, prominent business men were in no doubt as to its value. The group was anxious immediately to explore the oil situation in Mesopotamia and could not have found anyone better than Cowans with his great prestige to undertake the task. His salary and allowance were on such a very handsome scale that they made his emoluments as Q.M.G. seem small.

Thanks to the courtesy of Mr. Winston Churchill, who had succeeded Lord Milner as Secretary of State, his departure from the War Office was arranged at a few days' notice. Cowans and Churchill had always been good friends largely because the latter was ever ready to hear and consider the soldier's point of view, which had not been the case with all the Secretaries of State under whom Cowans had served.

Having facilitated his retirement, Mr. Churchill gave a dinner in his honour and made a handsome speech in his praise. Practically every member of the Army Council was present and most of the Q.M.G.'s personal assistants at the War Office.

A few days later Cowans was on his way to Mesopotamia in the company of his old friend and colleague, General MacMunn.

§ 2

On September 18, after his return from Mesopotamia, Cowans visited Carlisle for the purpose of being presented with the Freedom of his native City. The occasion was

very gratifying to him, the more so that it was associated with the City's tribute of thanks to all its sons who had served in the War. A notable company gathered together to do him honour, and the Mayor eloquently recited his great services to the Commonwealth.

In his reply Cowans, no longer a serving soldier, permitted himself some freedom in expressing the disappointment he felt at the manner in which the work of the Administrative Services had been slighted by the omission of their name from the Thanks of Parliament to the Navy and Army. This exclusion he described as "amazing," indeed "alarming," in that it might have very far-reaching effects on the Army in the future.

Speaking at some length he said: "It in no wise encourages (but very much the reverse) officers or civilians to maintain the fighting forces in the Field with the essentials indispensable to success. No dreamers of the most profound strategy can do anything without first being certain of their maintenance and supply services being perfect. Take the Gallipoli campaign—at the very suggestion of it Lord Kitchener sent for the Adjutant-General and myself and asked if we could maintain another Army there; it was his first thought. The Staff is divided into the General Staff, as represented by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and the Administrative Staff, as represented by the Adjutant-General, the Quartermaster-General and the Master-General of the Ordnance, and it will be a very bad day for the Army if soldiers conceive the idea that the only ladder to promotion is by means of the General Staff.

"Administration is absolute drudgery, however interesting, and requires your attention every moment, and requires also foresight in providing reserves. I begged Lord Kitchener many times up to his sad end to show recognition to the officers and civilians who slaved, particularly at the commencement of the War, to make bricks without straw from 9 a.m. to 2 and 3 a.m. next morning. Who realises now what they went through during those first eighteen months?

"What soldier was consulted, is what I should like

to know, when the Thanks of Parliament were drafted? I am convinced the draft was not seen by the Army Council, whilst I feel sure no Administrative Officer saw it, and in my opinion the omission is lamentable. I mention this omission in fairness to our administrative subordinates and civilian co-workers in all trades, who did so magnificently, and ensured the success of our fighting men. Had they failed in their efforts disaster was inevitable. Any slip on their part or failure would have caused an outcry, and quite rightly; but they never failed, and anyhow I can assure them that His Majesty, at any rate, is, and always has been, most appreciative of their work and of the Administrative Services of the Army; as also have been all the Commanders in the Field, who have over and over again written to me and also told me whenever I visited them that they could not say enough in praise of the Adjutant-General's and Quartermaster-General's work.

"This has been a war of administration, rather than of strategy or tactics, except in Palestine and Mesopotamia, where, in the former, a brilliant cavalry leader had the chance of a lifetime which he so ably seized; and, in the latter, I lost a dear friend in Sir Stanley Maude, who was my Assistant whilst I was Director-General of the Territorials; he was a splendid, thorough soldier who made no rash advance until he was sure of his Lines of Communication and Administrative Services.

"I should like you to know that I, as Quartermaster-General at the War Office, would never have been able to tackle these gigantic problems without the able and loyal assistance of the Directors and others at the head of the departments under me. I luckily had the experience of being in charge of the Movements Branch all through the South African War and a previous experience of some years in the War Office, so was able to collect as Directors tried men whom I knew; whilst I cannot ever thank my Secretarial Staff sufficiently for their loyal and able support. I shall be ever grateful to them; they had no easy task. I can assure you beyond your military duties as Quartermaster-General there are many underground

influences ever at work against you, and it is no bed of roses.

"The expenditure will show the gigantic work in most departments. It amounted to about two and a half millions a day in all Services, though I was always trying to get it down to under two millions."

Cowans then referred warmly to his visit to Carlisle in December of 1918, when he accompanied President Wilson on the occasion of his receiving the Freedom of the City. After a generous tribute to the American Army and people he expressed his appreciation of the fact that the United States had bestowed on him the Distinguished Service Medal, and he read aloud the following letter which General Pershing wrote him on the occasion:

April 6, 1919.

The President has directed me to confer upon you the Distinguished Service Medal in the name of the Government of the United States.

As Quartermaster-General to the British Forces during the whole period of the campaign you performed with distinction the arduous duties entailed. You displayed exceptional ability in organisation, making your Service one of unusual efficiency. By your sound judgment and prompt action you surmounted serious difficulties, achieving brilliant success.

As soon as suitable arrangements can be concluded you will be informed of the date and place of presentation.

JOHN J. PERSHING.

Last of all he paid tribute to his old friend and Chief, Lord Kitchener. He described him as "a truly magnificent man—whose memory ought to remain in the heart of every Briton. He alone aroused the country to a sense of its duty, and we were all devoted to him. He said what he wanted, and if he found a Staff Officer an incapable creature he applied Lord Fisher's three R's—Ruthless, Remorseless, and Relentless—and rightly so. Never

whilst either in the East or in the War Office did I know Lord Kitchener interfere with any work in any department unless it was shaky."

§ 3

The preoccupations of the later stages of the War had made Cowans put off the question of the operation that was essential before he could be free from pain or regain his normal health.

After he left the Army he became immediately immersed in business and found it difficult, if not impossible, to take the necessary time. Always a man of extraordinary health and energy, he refused to believe that anything serious could be the matter with him.

He had been very ill in the early part of 1920, when he had a spell in Hospital, and in November he at last decided to consult Dr. Gwynne Lawrence. He was again suffering a great deal of pain accompanied by profuse bleeding which prevented him carrying out any sort of engagement. He became a thin, weak man and was unable to eat.

He allowed that in 1918 he had lost two stone weight, and had then experienced similar discomfort, although to a lesser extent—and that he had ignored such attacks during that period—believing them to be a " touch of gravel to be put up with " when leading a very busy life.

Examination showed conclusively that he was suffering from the gravest trouble in the right kidney, and that it was already in a very advanced stage. After consultation with Sir John Thomson-Walker, F.R.C.S., it was decided that, in view of the great pain, and persistent hæmorrhage, operation was the right course, even though it was probable that it could only be a measure of relief, since the disease had progressed so far that involvement of other organs was almost a certainty. This unfortunately proved to be so.

The operation took place in a well-known nursing home. He stood it well, and his severe symptoms disappeared. He was, say those who nursed him, a

delightful patient and was as happy as it was possible to be under the circumstances.

During the time following his operation he preserved all his old humour, in spite of the inevitable suffering, and his interest in everything was as keen as if he were living his ordinary life and seeing his numerous friends.

He was in the end sorry to leave the nursing home, and everyone there sorry to lose him. On December 2 he went to Lady Carnarvon's (Almina, Countess of Carnarvon), at 1, Seamore Place, and later to Lord Cowdray's (the Viscount Cowdray, C.B.), in Sussex.

His one desire was to get about again, which he insisted on doing rather unduly soon. It had been arranged that he should go to Algeciras for the reason that from there he could get home easily in the event of recurrent symptoms appearing; however, he, went to stay with friends at Cap Ferrat in the South of France in the beginning of 1921, although still an invalid with serious possibilities.

On March 7 he was removed to a nursing home at Mentone; he arrived there in a very weak condition and it was soon evident that his illness was one from which there was no hope of recovery; it is, however, doubtful if he at first realised this himself.

He suffered severely and, being most anxious to get home, every effort was made by his friends, at his request, to have him moved to England; but the efforts of Lady Carnarvon, Lord Northcliffe [1] (the Viscount Northcliffe of St. Peter), Lord Cowdray and others were useless. He even appealed to the late Sir Frederick Treves who was then in the Riveira. Sir Frederick, although he realised the nursing home depressed Cowans, considered he was not fit to be moved, and privately told Lord Northcliffe so. The French Government afterwards said that had they only known that the great English soldier wanted it, they would gladly have sent a special train to convey him home.

Then came the great outward change of his life.

[1] Died 1922.

It was not so sudden as has been thought; it was not a matter he discussed, but some at least of his most intimate friends knew he had seriously contemplated such a step. Nor, of course, is there any ground for the charge, so usual in similar circumstances, that he was influenced from outside sources to make his decision to enter the Roman Catholic Church: in the end he but followed in the steps of his mother and brother in adopting the Faith of his Italian ancestress.

About a month before his death he spoke to a friend of his definite desire to change his faith and become a Roman Catholic, mentioning that his mother was one, and also speaking of a cousin who was a very High Churchman.

On being asked some time later if he would care to see a clergyman, he said: "If I am going to die I wish to do so in the Roman Catholic Faith. Whom can I see?"

He was told of an Army Chaplain, Father Morgan, who was then at Mentone, who might be the sort of man he would enjoy talking to. Enquiring what he was like, he was told a story. Father Morgan had been visiting some nuns at a convent and the conversation turned upon the Army. The Reverend Mother expressed herself as having been rather scandalised during the War at some of the things the Tommies in the neighbourhood had done, and spoke in strong terms of their lax ways at times regarding the performance of their religious duties. Father Morgan was equally outspoken and replied: "Now, none of that talk, please, Reverend Mother. I undertake to say that those Tommies, who have given their all for their country, will go like rockets to heaven and you and I will be lucky if we get a chance of holding on to their coat-tails!"

Cowans was delighted and exclaimed: "That's the man for me; bring him along one of these days and let me see him."

Father Morgan came, and the two soldiers, the Quartermaster-General and the Priest, had many long talks.

Lady Cowans arrived in Mentone on April 5, and on the 11th Cowans was received into the Roman Catholic

Church. On the 12th he was anointed and made his Confession of Faith in the presence of his wife and Father Morgan, desiring it to be made known that he was received at his own request.

He died on April 16, shortly after 3 a.m., and his Requiem Mass at the Parish Church of St. Michael in Mentone was attended by his old friend the Duke of Connaught, representing the King, by many notabilities and by official representatives of the French Government and Army.

Of his public funeral in England there is little need to speak. In every way one of the most imposing of its kind, it was a striking illustration of our national willingness to show to the dead a recognition we are not prepared to accord to the living.

A few days before his death a representative of the business interest with which he was connected visited Mentone for the purpose of seeing him. It was impressed upon Cowans that he was far too ill to do business, and he replied, "I must—for my wife's sake; it may be a help to her."

Unfortunately circumstances made it necessary later that his Orders and Decorations should be publicly sold.

The sale of even a single war medal is a matter of general regret, but when it is a question of publicly exposing in a tradesman's window for purchase by the highest bidder all the medals, orders and decorations of a man who had rendered to his country such great services as Cowans did, every soldier and citizen has a feeling not only of sorrow but of shame.

However inevitable the necessity, it must always be deplored. It has, moreover, an international aspect inasmuch as Allied countries cannot like seeing the honours they have bestowed disposed of in this way. Every soldier and friend of the late Quartermaster-General was filled with dismay and their feelings were shared by the King himself. His Majesty was not only greatly concerned by this incident, which he would have liked to have been given an opportunity of averting, but was anxious about the ultimate destination of the Decorations.

Happily this is assured because the generous anonymous purchaser made it a condition that, while they are to remain in the keeping of Lady Cowans for her life, they will afterwards pass to the United Service Museum, there to remain for ever as a memorial of Cowans and his work.

The whole incident of the purchase of the Decorations was handled with a degree of tact and sympathy, a modest and anonymous chivalry that is surely a tribute to our poor human nature. By noon of the day on which they were first exposed for sale several offers of immediate purchase were made. One, it is understood, was made by two or three of the Q.M.G.'s old brother-officers who were prepared at once personally to guarantee the necessary amount and later raise the money amongst their friends and his. But the earlier offer had, of course, priority, and a friend who had for him not only an intense admiration but "a warm affection" had the melancholy satisfaction of rendering him a last service.

Every effort was made to gain special consideration for the question of a suitable pension for Lady Cowans. The King himself took a personal interest in the matter, and did everything he could. The maximum Civil List pension of a hundred pounds a year was offered to Lady Cowans, who, however, refused this gift.

If a suggestion might here be made with diffidence it is that, of the hundreds who, in connection with the preparation of this record, have written of Cowans with warm affection and deep admiration, some one should initiate a movement to create a permanent memorial to a man who solely by native gifts of character, capacity and charm carried out for Britain with consummate success a task that did much to save her from disaster; a man who never failed a friend or injured an ememy and who, of humble stock, became one of the historic figures of the British Army.

CHAPTER IX

POST SCRIPTUM

The soldier's suspicion of the politician—Cowans's point of view—Discriminates between statesman and politician—Tributes from Mr. Clynes, Lord Selborne, Lord Curzon, Lord Balfour, Mr. Runciman, Lord Milner—Affection of his brother-officers—Admiration of the French—Lord Rawlinson's opinion—Lord Jessel describes Cowans's disappointment that the Administrative Services were not thanked—General MacMunn's account of visit to Mesopotamia—Who won the War?—Would Cowans have been successful in the field?—Distinguished soldiers' opinions—The Duke of Connaught's tribute—The King's admiration of the Administrative Services—His Majesty personally conveys his appreciation to Cowans—General Smith-Dorrien's unfulfilled prophecy—Lord Devonport deplores lack of recognition given to Cowans—The joint efforts of Cowans and Sir Maurice Hankey as a factor in achieving victory—Cowans's dislike for Mr. Lloyd George—General Brancker relates how Cowans fought Lloyd George for his department's independence—Lady Milford Haven's tribute—The friendship of Prince and Princess Christian—General Capper shows that Cowans's first and last thought was for the "Tommy"—Last Reflections—The Greatest Quartermaster-General in history.

In the first volume a full summary was given of the chief characteristics of Cowans and an attempt made to present them in their cumulative aspect. The desire was in the earlier volume to show forth the man and, that being done—adequately or not as may be—to set down something of his work. It is hoped that the necessarily imperfect recital of his war-task will have served to prove the truth of the original estimate, and to

show how Cowans did everything by and through his personality to an extent that was unusual if not indeed unique.

It is therefore unnecessary to do more now than briefly touch on certain points left undeveloped earlier; or perhaps to emphasise a few others that came into prominence during the progress of the War. Beyond that, in parting with Cowans we will leave him (as he would himself have desired) in the company of friends. Few writers of the life of any man can have so often been besought to bring out fully this or that good quality in their subject, and certainly none ever received fewer depreciatory communications.

It does not always happen that the politician appreciates the soldier, and very often to the soldier the strategy of politics looks suspiciously like chicanery. To this charge the politician might reply by saying that the soldier is invariably a narrow-minded fanatic with only one point of view. There is amongst soldiers a general belief that it is a wise and healthy thing to keep apart from politics and politicians, and the instinct is sound. The soldier turned politician is nearly always as futile and foolish as the politician turned strategist and, as we learned to our cost during the War, that spectacle can touch the infinity of foolishness.

Few men cared less for or busied themselves less with politics than Cowans. A social and gregarious creature, he chose his friends, acquaintances and associates for purely human reasons. He knew better than most men that the opinions of politicians and their endorsement or censure goes for little, since they are not concerned with the issue of truth, but with votes. Their attitude at any particular moment will be dictated by popular opinion, and, even if they wanted to do so, they cannot afford to take the wide view.

On one of the very few occasions in his career in which Cowans touched in public on this subject he said, "I have always been brought up to realise by the many distinguished soldiers under whom I have served that a soldier should never enter the realm of the politician; if

he does he is apt to lose the respect and confidence of his brother-officers."

The true statesman, although he may take public opinion into consideration, is never dominated by it as is the mere politician. It is too often hurriedly assumed that we have few statesmen because we have few men of outstanding ability. But while ability is almost essential to statesmanship it does not follow that its mere possession raises a man to that rank. Statesmanship resides rather in that rare type of mind that is made with large discourse looking before and after. It may be accompanied by only moderate abilities, but its possession entitles a man to be accepted by all as one whose opinion counts. Such men can never be plentiful in any period, and Cowans knew well enough just who they were in his own. While he did not care one iota how mere politicians viewed him, he had the noble ambition to be thought well of by statesmen. And his ambition was realised. Representatives of this class of men speak of him here. They could be multiplied in all probability by the addition of the names of every man who counts in any of the political parties.

It is essential that the work of Cowans, influencing as it did our task in every theatre of war, should be seen from the point of view of the statesman, because they view the man's work as it affected the whole war, and in its proper perspective.

It will be well to begin with the Labour Party, not only because it lately conducted His Majesty's Government, but because their attitude towards a self-made man like Cowans must necessarily be one of sympathetic appreciation.

With the exception, however, of Lord Haldane, Mr. Henderson (the Right Honourable Arthur Henderson, P.C.), Mr. Clynes (the Right Honourable John Robert Clynes, P.C.), and, in a lesser degree, Mr. Barnes (the Right Honourable George Nichol Barnes, P.C.), none of them were brought into close contact with his work.

Mr. Clynes writes:

Sir John Cowans in France.

Vol II., p. 302.

LIBRARY

"I would like to put on record my view that the great service rendered by the late Sir John Cowans was of the highest value to his country during the terrible times through which we passed."

Turning to the Conservative Party, Lord Ernle's description of his relations with the Quartermaster-General and his high appreciation of Cowans as a man have been given already; but Lord Selborne (the Earl of Selborne, K.G.), who was President of the Board of Agriculture in 1915-16, adds the following tribute:

"My view of his work is simply stated. It is not possible to overstate the excellence of that work or its value as a contribution to victory."

Lord Curzon writes:

"I was Lord President of the Council and a member of the War Cabinet, but not President of the latter; and therefore have no particular right to speak. I knew Sir John Cowans as a friend of long standing, and also as Quartermaster-General, in which capacity he on several occasions attended the meetings of the War Cabinet. I thought him a most capable officer, active, painstaking, very prompt in answering letters, a thorough master of his business—also a very agreeable and kind-hearted man.

"I have no doubt that his services—very properly rewarded by a public funeral—contributed materially to the winning of the War."

Another tribute is from Lord Balfour:

"Like the rest of the world I formed a very high opinion of the administrative capacities of Sir John Cowans; and I believe his services as Quartermaster-General cannot be overrated. But during the War I was either at the Admiralty or at the Foreign Office, and in neither of these posts did I come across in any sort of detail the work of the late Quartermaster-General. I can do no more, therefore, than say that he has left upon me the impression of a man admirable in counsel, calm in judgment, and so complete a master of his business that no situation, however little foreseen, seemed to find him unprepared. The quiet ease with which he bore the

tremendous burden of his office must have impressed everybody who had to do with him."

Lord Crewe, like Lord Curzon and Lord Balfour, speaks as a member of the War Cabinet:

"I knew the late Sir John Cowans well, and, as a member of the War Cabinet Committees in 1914 and 1915, I had many opportunities of forming a general appreciation of his work. I was not, however, associated with him in any special branch of his duties, and I can, therefore, only speak generally of the impression which, as one of the central figures at the War Office, he left on my mind. I was impressed beyond anything by the complete lucidity and certainty with which he gave his opinion on any problem concerning his Department after a close examination of all the ascertainable facts. A force of a certain strength, at a given distance on one of the War fronts, could or could not be supplied with its war needs within a certain period, and could continue or not continue to be so supplied according as the Admiralty was able to furnish the necessary transport.

"Sir John never spoke with hesitation on such a point, and never allowed those who were consulting him to indulge in false hopes of what might be materially practicable. It is impossible to overstate the value of the confidence which he inspired in Ministers from their knowledge that what he said could be done, and that what he said was impossible must not be attempted."

Mr. Runciman (the Right Honourable Walter Runciman, P.C., President of the Board of Trade from 1914 to 1915) writes:

"I have recently run through my papers of the first two years of the War and I regret to find that so little was committed to writing on the transactions which I had with Sir John Cowans. I find, however, that when I asked Parliament in the early days of the War to give me power to secure a complete disclosure of stocks of food and raw materials in the country, he and I had several conferences on the subject and my impression at the time was one of admiration for his surprisingly wide knowledge of the ways, difficulties and

importance of the great merchants. I saw him day by day at various periods concerning things which were of common interest to the Board of Trade and the Supply Department of the War Office, and such notes as the following appear on the margin of my papers: 'Cowans promises to act promptly'; next day, 'Cowans as good as his word'; a little later, 'Cowans gets through immense amount of business with no fuss.'

"I found it necessary to make sure of the whole of the Argentine, Uruguay and Australasian meat supplies for the Army in the first place and for civilians afterwards. The American meat companies were inclined to expect much larger prices than before the War, and he and I had many conferences on this subject. Before any difficulties with the companies arose I requisitioned the whole of the refrigerated space aboard British steamers that carried frozen meat, and having secured that, I was able to strike a sufficiently good bargain with the meat companies overseas, by which we secured supplies for our own forces and later on for the French and Italian armies as well. He gave me a free hand in these dealings, and when they were completed the single note concerning him was, 'J. C. satisfied.'

"Cowans, however, was by no means stagnant in his views, and when after a good deal of enquiry the authorities came to the conclusion that the old peace ration of meat was really too large and led to unnecessary waste, it was Cowans who thought of the economy, and as far as I know there was never a word of complaint against the ration which was enforced throughout 1916, 1917 and 1918. That change alone in these three years saved the country an enormous sum of money.

"He had the easiest method of getting through work of any man in the War Office. I have seen a good deal of big commercial concerns as well as of Government Departments, but I never saw anything run more smoothly than his branch, or transact with more unfailing efficiency an immense volume of business with such a small staff. Of course he chose his men well. I remember how

emphatically he rejoiced over the expulsion by K. of one man who stood in the way.

"The Commission Internationale de Revitaillement gave many occasions for conflict between the interests of the Allied Governments and our own. Cowans always did his best to make things run smoothly, and again and again my papers show a short note from Wintour, who was the first executive officer of the Commission, and from Wyldbore-Smith (Sir Edmund Wyldbore-Smith), who succeeded him and did the work admirably for four years: 'Cowans as usual helpful.'

"If I had ever anticipated that my relations with him would have been of interest to the outside world, I would certainly have kept fuller records of his kindly and sometimes caustic wit which often brightened difficult and dreary business."

Lord Milner speaks not only as a statesman viewing the work of the Quartermaster-General from the standpoint of a member of the War Cabinet, but from his experience as Secretary of State for War during 1918 and 1919. He writes:

"My intimate association with him was short. Though I was a member of the War Cabinet since 1916, it was only when I actually went to the War Office, replacing Lord Derby, in April, 1918, that I came into close contact with Sir John.

"What struck me about him, as I have no doubt it struck my predecessors, was not only his unmistakable ability, but his great buoyancy, and wonderful spirits, apparently unaffected by the immense burden of work which he had been carrying for years. The truth is he was always above his work, never submerged by it, or losing sight of the main objects to be striven for in a mass of details. He had the gift of delegation, chose his instruments well and left a great deal to them in the way of execution, reserving himself for the big decisions and the general direction of the machine. And so, though he got an enormous amount done, he was never *overworked*, and totally free from the depression and despondency which overwork is apt to cause.

" He was very easy and pleasant to deal with, holding his own views strongly and expressing them freely, not 'grousing' on the rare occasions when those views did not prevail, but accepting loyally a decision once come to, and doing his best to carry out the policy of his Chief.

" During my short tenure at the War Office I was a great deal away in France, but when in London I saw him almost every day. We had naturally a great deal of business to transact together, and the more I saw of him, the greater became my appreciation of the value of his services to the State."

§ 2

Perhaps no soldier ever won the affection and admiration of his brother-officers to the extent that Cowans did. Many of them have already been quoted. General Lyttelton considers that Cowans, Sir Henry Wilson and Colonel Repington " were three of the very ablest of his contemporaries in the Rifle Brigade." Sir Archibald Murray praises highly the efficiency of the Supply and Transport Services during the War and considers it primarily due to Cowans. General Paris (Major-General Sir Archibald Paris, K.C.B.) says that during the War his work was the admiration of all, and quotes the French officer who said to him in 1915: *Vous avez toujours beaucoup de provisions mais peu de munitions!* With this may be linked up the remark of General Panouse (Major-General the Vicomte de la Panouse, K.C.M.G.), the French Military Attaché, who would give " testimony how much we Frenchmen appreciated the Quartermaster-General and the very big work he did during the War." General Mends states that " his services in the capacity of Quartermaster-General are universally acknowledged to have been unsurpassed." General Birdwood speaks with affectionate regret of a very real old friend of himself and his wife who possessed extraordinary ability; while Lord Rawlinson (General the Lord Rawlinson, G.C.B.), the Commander-in-Chief in India, writes:

"Jack Cowans was a close friend of mine for more than twenty years. I always held a high opinion of his outstanding ability and an admiration for his masterly grasp of the administrative machinery of military affairs as well as his power for work and tactful energy in getting things done. But it was on the administrative side that he excelled and not on the fighting or tactical side."

In earlier chapters have been given appreciations of those who served under him before the War. They must be extended by the inclusion of at least a few of those who came into close contact with him during those strenuous years.

General Bourcicault, who left the War Office before 1914, says:

"It is universally admitted that under Cowans no man who knew and did his work was ever interfered with. He was a judge of men and rarely gave his trust erroneously. The great Department of the Army for which he was responsible owed its success during the War in no small measure to the confidence and trust reposed in the heads thereof."

Colonel Spender-Clay (Lieutenant-Colonel Spender-Clay, C.M.G.), who was for a time one of his Military Secretaries, speaks of "his great capacity for carrying out an almost impossible task."

General Asser (His Excellency Lieutenant-General Sir John Asser, K.C.M.G., Governor of Bermuda), who speaks from the point of view of one who was General Officer Commanding the Lines of Communication in France, says:

"I had to work with his Department and everyone knows how well it was run. I had the greatest admiration for him and found him a most human man and a real good friend, and nothing can give me greater pleasure than to make some small acknowledgment of his kindness to myself and testify to his great ability and astounding common-sense."

Lord Jessel (Colonel the Lord Jessel, C.B.), who was Deputy-Director of Remounts at the War Office, writes:

"He was a man for whom I had the greatest respect,

and he was a most wonderful Chief because, if you possessed his confidence, he gave you a free hand and trusted you implicitly. He certainly kept all his subordinates up to the mark at the War Office, as he had a habit of sending for them at very uncertain times and nobody ever knew when he might be summoned. The result of this was that everyone was kept on the *qui vive* and there was no slacking. If Cowans was once convinced of the soundness of your views, he would always back you up and support you to the utmost of his power.

" He certainly was a most wonderful administrator and organiser. His real strength, however, lay in devolving the work that had to be done upon the picked men whom he himself had chosen. He was a strict disciplinarian, but very genial and human, full of common sense, and an extraordinarily hard worker. I do not think that anyone can realise the work he did for the Army and for the country during the War, because there is no doubt that the success of the Administrative Services which he controlled went a great deal to assure the ultimate victory of the Allies. There is one matter which he very keenly felt, and that was that no special mention was made in the Thanks of Parliament to the Army for the work done by the Administrative Services."

Lord Jessel's expression of opinion about the way Cowans felt the slight to the Administrative Services has been echoed by many others.

General Landon served immediately under the Q.M.G. throughout the War and for two years before it; he therefore speaks with extensive knowledge. He describes Cowans as " most sympathetic and considerate to all his staff. His extraordinary quickness in grasping all the details of a complicated situation, and he had to deal with many such during the Great War, combined with his imperturbable geniality, were the secrets of his great success as Quartermaster-General. His staff knew that they could always rely on his support. He gave them the credit for their good work on his behalf and himself accepted responsibility for their mistakes."

General MacMunn, who also served immediately under Cowans both before and during the War, says:

"When he went as Quartermaster-General to the War Office I went to work under him there, which I did for three years, the last eight months of which were during the War. Eventually I was sent out by him in a hurry to help organise the Gallipoli Communications which were in somewhat of a tangle. Later, I was appointed Deputy-Adjutant and Quartermaster-General of the Dardanelles Army and afterwards to take charge and organise the Communications in Mesopotamia. So I have seen a very great deal of his ways of working.

"Lord Kitchener (both in India and at the War Office) trusted him absolutely, while he also gained the confidence completely of the various Secretaries of State he served and of such a judge of character as Mr. Asquith.

"During the War everyone carrying out Quartermaster-General's duties at Headquarters of Forces in the Field knew that most free and liberal support, and the despatch of stores required, were certain.

"His gifts of organisation and his gift of accommodating himself when necessary to the characteristics of those with whom he was working resulted in his retaining his appointment the whole of the War, and bringing the Quartermaster-General's Services to a most triumphant state of efficiency. He had, too, what so many minds lacked in organisation matters, the power of 'going large' to an unlimited extent when circumstances demanded.

"Finally, when Sir John vacated the War Office and I was on my way to Mesopotamia to take over the post of Commander-in-Chief there (on the expiration of a month's post-Armistice leave), Sir John himself accompanied me to Mesopotamia with a view to studying the geography of the country in connection with oil interests under which he proposed to accept employment. I had, therefore, the intense pleasure of his company from England to Bagdad and was able to show him some of the Communication work which he had so supported from home. His early

death was a great loss to the Army, for his opinion and advice on all essential matters of Quartermaster-General's organisation would always have been worth having; while his friends and those officers whom he had trained and who had served through the Great War under his ægis will all mourn deeply for that wonderful head and delightful companion."

Lastly, in this connection, General Sir Richard Stuart-Wortley speaks with no uncertain voice. As Director of Movements at the War Office, and later as a Divisional Commander in France and as Deputy-Quartermaster-General in Mesopotamia, he had unusual opportunities of judging Cowans and his work at home and in the Field. "It is difficult," he writes, "to say what share of praise was due to J. S. C. for the efficiency of the Transport Services, but as far as I am concerned I can only say that it was only by knowing that I had his keen brain, his experience and his unfailing support behind me that I could carry on the job at all. He never interfered with details, but left me to run my show myself; I, of course, reporting to him on all subjects of real importance.

"At the beginning of the War he held daily conferences of all his Directors, which enabled him to co-ordinate the work and the Directors and to know and appreciate what was going on in other departments. After some three or four months, when everything had got into very good running order, these conferences were discontinued, but the central and the personal influence of the Quartermaster-General remained. I can say with certainty that, had we not had a strong man at the head of Quartermaster-General's business, there must have been a breakdown.

"I knew J. S. C. slightly for many years, but not intimately, nor was I ever associated with him professionally till April, 1914, when I went to the War Office as Assistant-Director of Movements. No one who ever served under J. S. C. could have failed to have, not only respect for his qualities of head, but affection for his qualities of heart. He had an excellent brain and could seize the points of a question very quickly. He had great

capacity for work, though his love of enjoyment was also keen. Thus at the beginning of the War he was often absent for a couple of hours for lunch, but those who reproached him for this were unaware that he often worked at the War Office up to one and two o'clock at night.

" He had the keenest sense of humour; and no one in a high position ever appreciated more the necessity of trusting his subordinates and leaving them to their own jobs. These last qualities made him a delightful master to serve. At the same time inefficiency was never tolerated by him and he quickly disposed of those shown to be unfit for their positions. J. S. C. was indeed not only a big man but a very lovable man, and perhaps the more so in that he had his little weaknesses! I think as a colleague he must have been most acceptable, for he had no narrow-mindedness but was only out for the interests of the Army at large and the nation.

" But the whole of J. S. C.'s business in the War was so very great that it is impossible to do it justice in a few words. It must be remembered that he was responsible for feeding, clothing and equipping the greatest Army we have ever put in the Field and for the efficiency of the greatest Transport Service there has ever been in the world. No stone was ever thrown at his side of the War Organisation, and its complete success must be his greatest testimony."

§ 3

The question of who won the War has often been debated. The debate may be touched on here, at any rate in so far as it affects Cowans. It is noteworthy how many eminent soldiers consider that great as was the success of Cowans as Quartermaster-General, it would have been as great or greater in the Field. This, it will be remembered, was the view of General Spencer Ewart, and General Lane and General Stopford share it. General Lane says:

" On several occasions during the War I had to go

and see him at the War Office, found him up to his eyes and ears in work but never hurried or worried. He must have been blessed also with a remarkable constitution as, always popular in Society, he would, during all the trying time of the War, keep luncheon and dinner appointments, but was always back again at his work perfectly clear in brain, as in his orders and decisions. And at that work he was always to be found, I believe, till midnight and sometimes long after. His great regret was always that he had never been able to see any active service; his great powers of organisation were too fully appreciated in the Quartermaster-General's Department.

"He would have made a name for himself, I feel sure, and gone very high had he seen such service; he had the knowledge and the power over, and affection of, men who served under him."

It will have been noted that the view that he would have proved a successful commander in the Field is not shared by Lord Rawlinson. General Stopford, however, feels it was bad luck for him "personally that he never got on active service, but as far as the country was concerned he was an ideal Quartermaster-General and I really think that our success was as much due to the magnificent work he did at the War Office as it was due to the General Officers who were in Command in France. It was marvellous that he was able to improvise so many Departments without breaking down in health, as he must have been at it day and night. His work was far too valuable to be forgotten."

Colonel FitzGeorge (Colonel Sir Augustus FitzGeorge, K.C.V.O.) is amongst those who "think Sir John did not get half the credit he should have done: as it was, his untiring energy and devotion to work that made the War possible and without him I don't believe his Department could have done what it did."

The Duke of Connaught, who was an ever kind and helpful friend to Cowans from the day he nominated him for a Commission in the Rifle Brigade, writes:

"I valued the Staff work of the late General Sir John Cowans very highly, and as a Rifle Brigade Officer

he was an old friend. No one recognises more than I do the enormous amount of work he did during the War and the manner in which he was able to provide equipment, etc., on a very large scale at the shortest notice. His services to his country during the War were most remarkable."

Such words from such a source of unrivalled authority and experience are conclusive. There is, however, one thing more on this point that should be said.

If there was anything like a general failure to appreciate the great War service of Cowans and of the Department over which he presided it was certainly not shared by the King. When the Army Council attended at Buckingham Palace on Armistice Day to offer their congratulations to their Sovereign, His Majesty went out of his way personally to express, not only his admiration for the immense work so successfully carried out by Cowans, but his appreciation of the unequalled achievements of the Administrative Services throughout the War.

§ 4

The foregoing expressions of opinion, both individually and collectively, amount to a volume of evidence that is unassailable. To them may perhaps be added one or two which deal more specifically with the question from the point of view of its effect on the winning of the War.

General Pinney says, " My recollection of him is that he was one of the biggest-minded and frankly honest men I ever knew, and marvellously good-tempered. As to the Great War from *my view-point*, namely, General of Division, I saw Q.[1] had a much bigger share in the success of the War than G.[2] did."

General Lane is equally emphatic :

" It is generally admitted that two men, above any other, who really helped to win the War were Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson and General Sir John Cowans.

[1] Q., *i.e.*, the Quartermaster-General's Department.
[2] The General Staff.

Both belonged to the Rifle Brigade, and to both, I am happy to say, the Regiment has placed memorial tablets in Winchester Cathedral."

General Smith-Dorrien declares:

"The story of what the Army and the nation owe to his ability, energy and enterprise during the Great War, if a really full account can be given, will open the eyes of Britishers as to the debt they owed him and still owe—for it was he on whom the life of our vast and many armies depended—and not in vain—went to his grave unrewarded.

"If I had been asked to name one man, who, after the Commander-in-Chief in France, would be selected for a peerage when the honours list appeared, I should have said 'Jack Cowans,' and I believe the majority of senior officers in the Army, if asked, would have made the same selection."

It might be said that these are but the warm-hearted and generous tributes to a dead brother-soldier that naturally spring to the lips of all generous men. Let us then quote a very distinguished civilian, a great business man, who is naturally free from any professional bias. Lord Devonport (the Viscount Devonport, P.C.) says:

"I intensely admired him and his great work as Q.M.G. I saw something of his organisation when I was Food Controller. It was simply wonderful the way in which he kept everything going with demands of an ever-fluctuating kind being thrown at him without harmony or notice. He always rose to the occasion. In my judgment he was as great a winner of the War as any of those who received recognition and reward. Had he or his organisation failed, nothing could have given success to any movement in the Field. But this was sparsely recognised by those in whose power and province it was to *accord* recognition."

Here, then, are men of different ages and rank, of varied experiences, all men of affairs occupying positions such as entitle them to speak with authority, not only protesting against the conspiracy of silence in which the vast achievements of Cowans were shrouded, but giving

him a place beside the one or two whose names will stand out in history amongst the foremost few whose individual work had a real and definite effect on the winning of the War. It is doubtful if, even when all is known, history will acclaim any single individual as the winner of the War; but, if it does, it most certainly will not place the laurel wreath on the head of politicians who would have forestalled judgment and snatched it from the hands of futurity.

If, however, the combined work of any two individuals may fairly be said to have won the War it was that of Maurice Pascal Alers Hankey and John Steven Cowans. Hankey's work of preparation, which included the compilation of the War Book, greatly exceeded that of Cowans in magnitude; on the other hand, after war was declared the task of Cowans was so gigantic as to be almost inconceivable. Soberly speaking, the joint efforts of these two men did more to bring about victory than any other single factor.

Probably it is invidious, if not indeed wrong, to ascribe the winning of the War to any individual or group of individuals, but, if it be permitted, there can be no doubt of the just claims of Hankey and Cowans, and the opinion is one that already has received the highest endorsement.

And think how cheaply it was done. Hankey, it is true, got a modest grant from Parliament of £25,000 and a Grand Cross of the Bath; Cowans was advanced from a K. to a G.C.B., and his promotion to full General perhaps a little anticipated—that was all. One must not forget, however, the "semi-public" Funeral Service—whatever that may mean—at Mentone and the Public Funeral at home which, even could he have known of it, would have been small comfort to the man who went to his long rest heart-sick with anxiety for the future of his wife. The man who on his death-bed more than two years after the Armistice receiving a telegram asking him "what honours he would like" merely turned wearily on his side and said, "Damn him."

Cowans himself would adopt the view that while Army

Chiefs, Staff Gunners, Sappers, Cavalry, Air Force, War Machines, and all the rest were each in their way and degree marvellous, the one man who won the War was the inglorious, unconsidered, unheroic, shilling-a-day foot-slogging Infantryman who from beginning to end stuck it in the trenches.

§ 5

Cowans had no jealousy and very little capacity for hatred. It is true that he believed he had just cause to dislike Mr. Lloyd George. He certainly hated flies and always kept a fly-killer near him; tradition has it that the only two things in life he feared were wasps—and a certain lady who shall be nameless.

These things apart, no man ever allowed envy, hatred or uncharitableness to enter less into his life, and that one solid, indisputable fact lifts his whole character and life into an ethical plane where many patterns of private and public virtues might have some difficulty in following him.

Let us then leave Cowans and his fame and future in the safe keeping of England and in the warm hearts of his uncountable friends. So numerous are they that even to name them would take up many printed pages.

As with other aspects of his life let the words of the few be accepted as those of the many.

First of all there is Sir Sefton Brancker, his intimate friend from the days they first met in India, who holds that Cowans was legitimately jealous of his fame and absolutely straight and honest, and states:

"All through his Army career, when serving on the Staff, no one would let him go, and he was the one high official in the War Office who remained in his appointment from start to finish without one single *serious* criticism being made against him or his administration. He was overwhelmed with responsibilities and worked day and night—but he was always cheerful, courteous and tactful—always had a joke ready—and was always *accomplishing* something—never wasting time. The result

was that at the end of it he scarcely received any recognition at all, and I think this was one of the largest factors which led him to retire from the Service and take to business.

"It is difficult to determine the exact reasons for the extraordinary success of his Department, but I put it down very largely to the personality of Jack Cowans. He had unbounded energy. He was absolutely ruthless to red tape, conservatism and intrigue, and he trusted and helped his subordinates by all the means in his power. If they failed him, he was again ruthless and got rid of them at once.

"One of the great troubles in writing about Jack Cowans is really to bring out his extraordinary good qualities because from his very carelessness regarding his own affairs, nearly all the details of his private life can be turned to count against him. All I can say is that, looking back, he stands out as being one of the most able, most charming and most dependable men I have ever known. I had a deep affection for him and would have done anything for him. He, I think, would have helped me, although he never actually had the opportunity or the cause. Again I would accentuate his qualities of fearlessness, broadmindedness and his tremendous spirit of helpfulness."

Major Pearson (Major the Honourable Harold Pearson), who served during the War on Cowans's personal Staff, would record that "there were two characteristics which to my mind tended in a large degree towards making him the great man he was: first his wonderful ability in getting at once, and without loss of time or waste of energy, at the heart of any matter which necessitated his attention; and the other that he got the best out of all working under him. He preferred to have under him a man whose weakness he knew rather than the superman whom he did not know, and while he expected the best out of every man, every man knew that he was working under a loyal Chief."

Lord Lucan writes:

"It was his personality that always counted and he

[By permission of Major the Hon^ble. Harold Pearson.

THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN OF SIR JOHN COWANS.

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had the knack of inspiring those under him. He never shirked work himself. But he was many-sided and liked play as well as work, and he was able by his quick brain and powers of concentration to get through an enormous amount of business in a short space of time. He was the truest friend and never forgot anyone. When my boy was dangerously wounded in September, 1918, he rang up of his own accord, and arranged for me to go over and stay with the Quartermaster-General in France."

Lord Francis Scott, who knew and served with him in India, would like to see recorded "his astounding capacity for quick and thorough work, and his extraordinary kindness of heart. Nothing was ever too much trouble for him, and he was never too busy to have time to hear the, probably unimportant, worries of his friends. I suppose his work in the late War was really the most successful of that of anyone in a big position."

Lord Astor would emphasise his "amazing efficiency and freshness" and points out that "many people mistook his spirits and love of life for flippancy because they knew nothing of his output of work, his attention to detail, his quick grasp of new ideas."

Cowans was lucky enough to be serving at the War Office during three critical periods of our military history. This, and the fact that he was the only member of the Army Council who served throughout the War, gave him a unique position. General Carter speaks of this:

"My own knowledge of Sir John dates back to the time when we were both Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-Generals at the War Office in 1901 to 1903 or 1904, and I think that it will generally be acknowledged that few officers who have served in the War Office in more than one appointment during their careers had such influence on its policy as Jack Cowans."

One who served under him at the War Office in a comparatively humble capacity speaks of the hours Cowans spent looking into the cases of soldiers charged with misdemeanours, and who were during the War given the right of appeal to a member of the Army Council. Whether they knew him or not they all felt

their case would be sympathetically and understandingly reviewed by the Q.M.G., if only they could get it to him. And they were right.

Lord Edward Gleichen would have it recorded that, no matter how busy during the War, he always found time to help everybody, and recalls gratefully his kindness in getting a post for the Quartermaster of the "Lonsdale" Battalion of the Border Regiment. This Cowans did at the request of Lord Edward's sister, Lady Valda Machell, whose husband, a soldier of distinction and rare charm, was killed at Thiepval on July 1, 1916. Quartermaster or General, it was all the same to Cowans.

The Dowager Marchioness of Milford Haven (Her Serene Highness Princess Louis of Battenburg) speaks with a simple and touching eloquence of a deep friendship:

"My husband had the greatest regard for Sir John Cowans's character and abilities and valued his friendship highly. He deplored that his great services during the War were not more fittingly and gratefully acknowledged.

"We spent several happy Christmases together with Sir John as guests of Prince and Princess Christian at Cumberland Lodge and Frogmore House, when there were good opportunities for long, interesting talks, which I think both men equally enjoyed. But Sir John also understood how to make himself beloved by the young people in the house, joining merrily in all their fun. To my sons he was most kind, and he used to take the younger, a schoolboy then, up to London to ransack Gamage's shop for toys, costumes and practical jokes with which they entertained us on their return. He showed a real interest in the development of their characters, and I gratefully recollect some wise advice he gave me about them.

"It will give me pleasure if these few words of mine can be of any use as a tribute to the memory of one whose loss both my husband and I mourned as that of a sincere and charming friend."

Another Royal friendship of many years' standing

was that with which Cowans was honoured by their late Royal Highnesses the Prince and the Princess Christian; it was shared by all their family, including, of course, their Highnesses Princess Helena Victoria and Princess Marie Louise.

The late Prince Christian Victor, who was in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, and Cowans were close, indeed intimate, friends. This naturally led to frequent visits to Cumberland Lodge. There, as always, he was the life and soul of every party; the younger members of the Royal Family, to whom he was kindness itself, adored him.

When the South African War broke out Princess Christian desired to send out a Hospital Train and the advice, guidance and help of Cowans were invaluable. When, later, her eldest son gave his life for his country it was Cowans who undertook all the necessary arrangements. His sympathetic and practical helpfulness was so much appreciated by the bereaved mother that she ever after looked upon him as one of her dearest friends.

At the outbreak of the European War, Princess Christian at once began organising the magnificently-equipped Red Cross Hospital Train which eventually went out to France bearing her name and of which hundreds—indeed thousands—of wounded soldiers have a grateful recollection. Cowans was again invaluable, and no one would have been readier than Her Royal Highness to admit that its success owed much to him.

The friendship grew and strengthened with the years; and when the gallant and charming Prince Maurice of Battenburg was killed in action in France on October 27, 1914, Cowans wrote so beautifully and touchingly to Princess Christian that although Her Royal Highness never kept letters she always treasured his.

Field-Marshal His Royal Highness Prince Christian died on October 28, 1917, and, at the express wish of his widow, Cowans was accorded the high honour of being one of the pall-bearers.

Indeed Princess Christian consulted Cowans about everything and looked upon him as one of the most valued

friends of herself and her family. To use the words of a gracious lady, who from a position of the closest family intimacy, watched the friendship grow and strengthen: "It was one of the best and most beautiful things in his life."

As everyone who was honoured with the friendship of the late Princess Christian knows, Her Royal Highness had high ideals of friendship and felt strongly that its privileges, advantages, duties and responsibilities were mutual, and, large-hearted and generous, she ever consistently gave to her friends more than she received.

When being invested with the Freedom of the City of Carlisle in September, 1919, Cowans referred to his friendship for Prince and Princess Christian in these words: "I know full well how jealously guarded is the Freedom of your City, as is evidenced by the eight names selected since 1885 and all of whom have done such splendid work in life. I notice particularly one to whom I was deeply attached—I refer to the late Prince Christian. Both the Prince and Her Royal Highness have shown to me friendship, kindness and hospitality beyond words for very many years. The Prince was a devoted friend to England, and his son, who died in South Africa, was one of my greatest friends."

The final word, however, shall be that of a soldier because it expresses something of all the ordinary soldier serving in the Field owed to Cowans. The Tommies were his first and last thought and to their well-being and creature comforts his whole life was dedicated, in no high-priestly spirit, but with that light-hearted gaiety each one of them would have loved could they only have known of it.

General Capper (His Excellency Major-General Sir John Edward Capper, K.C.B., Lieutenant-Governor of Guernsey) writes:

"All that I can personally say is that from the very first he was constantly sending out samples of all sorts of things which might add to the health and comfort of the troops, and it was owing almost entirely to his initia-

tive that they were so well supplied with trench-coats, leather waistcoats, gum-boots, etc., which so greatly alleviated the hardships of trench life; and that he was largely the factor which formed the Expeditionary Force Canteen, which he carried through in the face of great difficulties, and which proved of such immense value to the troops.

"The trouble he took over every detail was wonderful, and he never discarded the slightest thing which he thought might prove useful.

"There is no doubt that the Army owed very largely to him its comfort both in trenches and back lines and had it not been for his foresight, imagination and hard work, the sufferings, and probably loss by illness, would have been far greater than they were."

§ 6

Warming both hands before the fires of life, Cowans radiated friendliness and helpfulness wherever he went. He lived every second of his days. Without understanding the man it is impossible fully to appreciate his work. Had he faults? Of course he had: And failings? Yes. But he was a big man. Great? Perhaps not. When using that word we think of creative power. Perhaps he was not a great originator or creator of ideas. But give him an idea and he would breathe power, movement, achievement into it. He was, above all, human, and his work during the War is a proof—were one needed—that inevitable and invaluable as are perfect machinery and organisation they are in the ultimate dependent for their effect on the living power of a man.

In everything Cowans did he displayed courtesy, magnaminity, cheerfulness, friendliness; if these are not great qualities, qualities such as raise men to enduring fame, they are at any rate lovable, livable qualities; moreover, they enable their possessor, as so many have put it, to get things done. Cowans was remarkable, if not indeed unique, in this respect.

Then he had dogged courage of that quality which kept our men cheerful in the trenches long after their situation seemed hopeless. The way in which he stuck to his post at the War Office while suffering acute physical pain; how he stood up to the politicians and what he believed to be a deliberate, protracted, and not altogether creditable plot to filch the Quartermaster-Generalship from the Army and make it a civilian post, are episodes that must command warm admiration. In the latter instance his belief may or may not have been well founded; but he was singularly shrewd, sane and unemotional, and on no other occasion in his career did he show any tendency to imagine that he was in the remotest degree the object of intrigues, dislike or depreciation.

He bore with a simple dignity the slight which was undoubtedly put upon the Administrative Services of the Army and, the least self-seeking of men, he cared not a jot that he was passed over personally except in so far as it looked like a reflection on the subordinates of whose work he had such a high and true appreciation, and in whose achievements he had such legitimate pride.

No Quartermaster-General in history is even faintly comparable to him in achievement; few men have been so great-hearted and loyal; none has been a better or more faithful friend; no soldier was ever more devoted to his Regiment, his appointed work, or the fame and glory of the Army; and as long as manliness, courage and service are considered by men as deserving of honour and acclaim, so long will his name endure.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I.

An appreciation by Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Altham, K.C.B., K.C.I.E., C.M.G.

JACK COWANS'S career in the Army was unique in that he won the very highest reputation for brilliant war service without ever having had himself the good fortune of serving in the Field. The foundations of this great reputation were laid in the South African War—a preparatory period of strain and stress, of much value as a bracing tonic to the nation, the Government and the fighting Services. But the main structure of Cowans's claim on national remembrance and gratitude was built up in that great War, on the issues of which the fate of the Empire and civilisation depended. In both these wars Cowans had the fortune—perhaps in some ways an ill-fortune for himself, though a happy one for the Army—to be indispensable at the War Office, in the South African War as the Staff Officer charged with the responsibility for carrying out the movement six thousand miles overseas of the largest force the world had ever seen so transferred, in the Great War as the supreme head of the Department, responsible not only for the movement, but, too, for the entire maintenance of armies operating in three separate continents and in their aggregate strength adequately presenting in arms, for the first time in history, the greatest Empire of the world.

The real magnitude of Sir John Cowans's responsibility as Q.M.G. to the Forces during the European War can only be comprehended by those who, day by day, week by week, and year by year, had under his direction to face

at the War Office the stupendous problems involved and to work out the details of their solution. Never before had operations been undertaken by any State—and that on a great scale—in ten distinct theatres of war,[1] separated from each other by vast distances of land and sea, and widely differentiated in their climates, local requirements and methods of fighting. The equipment of the armies assigned to the various theatres, their movement thither, and maintenance therein not only in food, transport, clothing and fighting material, but also in the ever increasing technical needs of troops in modern war presented a task, which even now astonishes the mind to look back on, and would, beyond all doubt, have been pronounced as humanly impossible if it had been foreseen and systematically examined in pre-War days.

But though that task only attained its culminating point of staggering magnitude after the theatres of war had been multiplied ten-fold, and the British Forces in the Field thirty-fold, it was in the earlier stages of the War, in the first six months or year, that the Quartermaster-General of the Forces was faced with the gravest anxieties, the heaviest problems. The standard of preparation for war accepted by the Government throughout the decade before the Great War was of set purpose limited to the provision of:

(*a*) The fixed garrisons of India, of South Africa and of the overseas and home defended ports;

(*b*) Of six Infantry Divisions and one Cavalry Division for service overseas in time of war; and

(*c*) Of fourteen Territorial Divisions and certain Yeomanry Brigades for home defence.

Besides these there were maintained an Army Reserve and a Special Reserve, earmarked exclusively for the supply of drafts for (*b*). All other formations, whether Regular, Militia or Volunteer, had been deliberately

[1] *I.e.*, i. France and Belgium; ii. North China; iii. West Africa; iv. South-West Africa; v. East Africa; vi. Gallipoli; vii. Macedonia; viii. Egypt and Palestine; ix. Mesopotamia; x. North Russia.

To these may be added the North-West Frontier of India, Persia, etc.

scrapped by Mr. Arnold Forster and Lord Haldane, as superfluous to the requirements of the Empire, as determined by the Government. The provision of material reserves was similarly strictly limited to the same standard. In fact the most important recommendation of the *Royal Commission on the South African War*, that the organisation of the Army should be planned with a view to its expansion in time of war, was, not so much forgotten, as deliberately rejected, and that too with the suggestion that at last a scientific army reform had been accomplished, which would effectively meet every liability.

The Military Staff at the War Office, it may be very definitely stated, were not responsible for this ostrich-like delusion. Not only at the time of the inception of the Territorial Force had the General Staff prepared a scheme for twenty-eight Territorial Divisions, only to be cut down to fourteen by Mr. Haldane, but the late Sir Henry Wilson in an appreciation of the strategical situation, which, as Director of Military Operations, he was called upon to give personally to certain Cabinet Ministers, when the possibility of war between the Central Powers and the Entente group became evident, actually set forth in plain figures on a black-board for their enlightenment the number of Army Corps each Power could put into the Field and the serious superiority of the aggregate of the Central Powers. Yet even that simple lesson in strategical arithmetic failed to convince the politicians of the need for preparation for expansion. Thus the hands of both the General and Administrative Staffs at the War Office were tied, and any preparation for the really vital needs of the coming struggle precluded.

On the other hand, be it said to the credit of the pre-War Government, that they did permit the Military Staff to pay unrestricted attention to preparation for the mobilisation of the Expeditionary Force up to its full fixed strength, and that, moreover, thanks to Cabinet co-operation, preparation for war up to that standard was shared in by all other Departments of the State. Without such co-operation mobilisation plans would

undoubtedly have been hampered and delayed, but even with it the perfect clock-like smoothness with which the mobilisation of the whole of the armed forces of the United Kingdom was carried out in the early days of August, 1914, was a feat without parallel in the history of the administration of the British Army.

The need for a definite plan and system for the transformation of the forces of the crown from a peace to a war footing in a grave national emergency had not indeed been realised until towards the end of the last century, when Sir Henry Brackenbury, as Director of Military Intelligence, drew attention to its necessity and carried out the initial spade-work of the problem. Later, the responsibility of its study was transferred to a special Mobilisation Division, working under the direction of Lord Wolseley, then Commander-in-Chief. On Lord Roberts's appointment to that office, Mobilisation was again united with Intelligence in one Department under Sir William Nicholson.

Finally on the reconstitution of the War Office on the recommendations of the Esher Committee, it was rightly recognised that the executive duties of mobilisation in all its many complicated details must of necessity fall on the Administrative Staff, and that therefore it is wise to place on that Staff the entire responsibility. More open to criticism perhaps was the decision to invest the Adjutant-General's Department with this responsibility, for though the provision of personnel is the primary essential of mobilisation, as a matter of fact that provision is made in peace establishments and reserves long before mobilisation is ordered. But the provision of animals, transport, and material needed to transform peace establishments to a war footing entails on the Quartermaster-General's Department far more complicated work, after the order to mobilise has been issued, than the mere summoning of Reservists to join the colours. The main burden of mobilisation and the entire burden of the consequent concentration are beyond all doubt Q. staff work.

Take the matter of remounts as an example of the

intricacy of the work of preparation in peace time for mobilisation. The units of the regular army, cavalry, artillery, infantry and transport have, it is true, a certain peace establishment of animals, but this establishment is much below war requirements, and does not even allow a margin for the replacement of animals found unfit on mobilisation. Staff units have no transport in peace. The units of the Territorial Force did not, and do not, possess one single animal in peace, their training requirements being met entirely by hiring. The Remount Department's small peace depots were only sufficient to meet the normal replacements of the peace establishments of the regular forces. The only source, therefore, from which the demands of mobilisation could be met was the stock of horses possessed by the civil population of the United Kingdom.

All these matters presented an interesting chapter in the Q. scheme for mobilisation prepared before the War. The provision of motor-vehicles was another chapter. The train arrangements for the movements of troops necessary to carry out the three processes of mobilisation, concentration and embarkation were a third.

To this must be added the precise arrangements which assured that each Army Reservist called up found, on arrival at his depot, boots and clothing of his exact size awaiting him, the provision of the equipment, ammunition and supplies needed for an army in the Field, and the establishment in France prior to the arrival of the British Expeditionary Force of a Line of Communications, with depots and reserves of supplies and stores to meet all immediate requirements.

The success of this initial staff work exceeded anything ever accomplished in the British Army. The only parallel to it was that of the South African War, but in South Africa, notwithstanding the long previous warning, the Divisions sent out from England were not ready to take the Field, until some weeks after their landing at Cape Ports. In the Great War, Sir John French's troops were able to move up to the front straight from their ports of disembarkation as fast as trains could be provided to

carry them, and on detrainment at once moved forward into the area of active operations.

That French's "contemptible little army" saved the Allied cause in those opening days of the Great War can be denied by no impartial military student. It is equally incontestable that but for the most perfect Q. staff work in its mobilisation, trans-shipment and entrainment to the front, that army, however potent and however well commanded, could not have arrived in time to carry out that achievement. If it had been late, if Joffre's left flank had been completely turned by the German advance through Belgium, it is more than possible that the Channel Ports would have been seized by the Kaiser's troops, and the whole subsequent course of the campaign in France changed to the grave disadvantage of the Allies.

But though too much credit can hardly be given to the Quartermaster-General's Department for the great services rendered in this respect to the Nation and the King, it would be unfair to suggest, and Sir John Cowans himself would have been the last man to claim, that the nation's gratitude was due to him alone The work was in fact the work of many men, of very varying rank, spread over many years. Nevertheless, the chief credit must in common justice be paid to the master-mind who had presided over the Department for the two years preceding the War, who had perfected the preparation of the work and who had been personally responsible for its execution. Even if Cowans's reputation had no other foundation to rest on than this, the success of his administration would have been for ever established by the first few weeks of the Great War.

The despatch overseas of the Expeditionary Force dwindles, however, almost to insignificance as an administrative achievement compared with the stupendous task that faced the Quartermaster-General immediately on its departure. The possibility of the conversion of the civil population, not only of the United Kingdom but of the great Dominions beyond the seas, into nations in arms had, it is true, been preached plainly and urgently before

the War by Lord Roberts and a small band of like-minded patriots, but by the British Government it had been steadfastly repudiated and pushed on one side, as an absurd and even dangerous delusion of "militarists." Indeed this repudiation had become so installed as an article of political dogma that not only, as has already been said, was all preparation for such a possibility neglected, but even units, such as field batteries, which would have been of the utmost value for a war expansion of the Army, were deliberately cut off the Army establishment as surplus to "scientific" requirements, and that although the Government of the day were, according to statements since made by its members, aware that war with Germany menaced this country.

Of all the great services rendered by Lord Kitchener to the British Empire, the greatest was beyond all doubt that of opening the eyes of the Government at the very outset of the War to the realities of the task with which the Empire was faced. The fate, not only of England, but of the civilised world, depended on the immediate acceptance of the Field-Marshal's prediction that the struggle would last for years and that final victory was only attainable by the nation in arms. The acceptance by the Government of this far-seeing pronouncement was not only endorsed by the vast majority of the whole British community, both at home and abroad, but the magnitude and force of the wave of patriotic feeling which then swept over the Empire made the task of the Administrative Staff at the War Office one of superhuman difficulty.

Forbidden by supreme authority up to the very outbreak of war to make any plans, to provide any reserve of personnel or material outside the rigidly circumscribed Haldane plan, they were at an hour's notice called upon to provide at once for the initial clothing, equipment and quartering of new armies of a strength treble that of the original Expeditionary Force, to assist India and all the overseas Dominions in a similar unforeseen expansion, and to prepare for the placing in the Field of these new forces, and for the bringing back from overseas of every regular unit that could possibly be spared therefrom.

It was fairly evident, moreover, that these great demands, requiring immediate liquidification, were but anticipatory of still greater, and that in any case to the maintenance of the Expeditionary Force in France, would have to be added the opening of other theatres of war and the maintenance of other forces therein.

The full history of the manner in which this time of strain and improvisation, of creation and construction, was tackled by Sir John Cowans can only be compiled from War Office records and from the testimony of those who had the privilege to serve under him at the War Office, but the experiences of the Southern Command, the administration of which I was in charge of during the first ten months of the War, may perhaps serve to throw some side-lights on the practical difficulties of the problems then faced by the General Staff and their magnitude.

The amazing fervour with which the nation responded to the call to arms was in truth about as overwhelming to our military administration as the miraculous draught of fishes of St. Peter's fishing-smack. From an administrative point of view the masses of recruits which rushed forward to enlist from every corner of Great Britain might be classified in three main categories :

(*a*) Enlistments for the Regular Army, Special Reserve and existing units of the Territorial Force.

(*b*) Enlistments for the New Army.

(*c*) Enlistments for new units and formations of the Territorial Force.

Of these, (*a*) had been foreseen and were "according to plan," (*b*) and (*c*) were entirely in excess of all pre-War forecasts. The three New Armies first called for by Lord Kitchener presented at once an aggregate establishment of over three hundred and fifty thousand officers and men. A fourth Army followed almost immediately, an addition of another hundred and twenty thousand. The Territorial Army at the same time, with marvellous energy, duplicated itself. Including category (*a*), probably over a million men were added to the British Military Forces at home before the end of 1914.

The provision of bulk supplies of food for this great multitude was a big task even in a country such as Great Britain; the distribution and preparation of such food were a still more anxious matter. Let me instance the case of a brigade camp at Wareham. The preparation of this camp was still incomplete when four so-called battalions of newly-enlisted men were despatched to it by train from the North of England. They were accompanied by six officers only, of whom four had been ordered to return by the next train! There were no non-commissioned officers, still less were there cooks. The Brigade Staff had not appeared. Wareham Common possessed no means of sustenance other than a few rabbits. Nevertheless, thanks to the tact and energy of an ex-Guards officer (who was sent in hot haste from Salisbury in a motor-car), to the help given by a small detachment of Yeomanry, and to the good humour and keenness of the men themselves, that brigade's domestic affairs were quickly readjusted in a few days, and a normal system of orderly military housekeeping established.

Blankets and clothing presented at the outset still more anxious problems. With some amusement and still more sympathy I can even now recall the dismay of the Assistant-Director of Ordnance Stores of the Southern Command when reporting that Woolwich had refused to honour his indents on the ground that their reserves were exhausted. To him, an old departmental officer of well-deserved reputation, recalled to duty from retirement, the shock was no less than the manager of a provincial bank would experience if told that the Bank of England had put up its shutters.

But the position was serious and we had to go out into the by-ways and hedges for the necessities of the moment. Thanks to the large-minded men at the much abused War Office, and in particular to the Quartermaster-General, home commands were for the time given practically a free hand, financially and in many other ways. We bought wherever we could find—supplies of clothing, shirts, socks and blankets. The scarlet clothing of the Special Reserve, laid aside on mobilisation, was seized on

and issued to replace the civilian clothing of the new soldiers. Blankets were advertised for, begged for, and requisitioned. Even second-hand clothing dealers were welcomed by command Headquarters and bargained with for their stores of garments, etc. The War Office were, however, prompt in their measures to remedy this hand-to-mouth system and, through the exertions of Sir John Cowans and his staff, in a surprisingly short time fresh supplies of khaki clothing, boots, shirts, blankets and all the necessities of camp and barrack life came pouring in, and local provision came to an end.

It will be remembered that although the actual issue to the troops of guns, rifles, ammunition and military equipment is a responsibility of the Quartermaster-General's Staff, the provision of all such war material is a matter for the Master-General of the Ordnance. It was, however, not the fault of the latter high official that the Divisions of the New Army were so handicapped for the lack of those essentials in the early months of their training. The shortage was the direct result of the pre-war policy of the Government.

The provision and the issue of animals, as well as all means of transport, was, on the other hand, entirely in the hands of the Q.M.G. How these were first obtained has, as regards horses, been already touched on. The speed with which well-organised and staffed Remount Camps were established all over the country under the orders of the Q.M.G. was perhaps one of the best bits of Q. Staff work done at home. These depots were, except for administrative supervision, administered directly by the Director of Remounts on Sir John Cowans's War Office Staff, but it was always a real pleasure to the Southern Command Staff to visit them from time to time, nominally to see whether any local aid could be given, but practically to admire and encourage the admirable work done by the Depot Commandants and their assistants.

But even during the early days of the War, and especially when the gales and heavy rain of the autumn made life under canvas a matter of real discomfort and

possible risk to health, the quartering of the new troops (enhanced in the Southern Command by the advent of some fifty thousand Canadian soldiers) became a grave problem for Sir John Cowans and the General Officers and Staff concerned.

To take the case of the Southern Command, the total peace establishment of the command before the War was but forty thousand; but, as this included Territorials and Special Reserve, the actual barrack accommodation was far below that number, Yet by November, 1914, the command showed an actual strength of over three hundred and fifty thousand troops. The three defended ports, Portsmouth, Portland and Plymouth, were filled to overflowing with their garrisons. The depots were similarly overcrowded with regular recruits. But the main crux as regards quartering were the seven Divisions of the New Army allotted to the command and the Canadian contingent. The encampment of these formations was in itself no light task. The story of Wareham—though but a minor incident—has been already told.

In the long, narrow valley of the Wyely running from Salisbury to Warminster a telegraphic order from the War Office on one occasion directed an encampment to be prepared for twenty thousand men in forty-eight hours. Subsequently more time was given, for the task, owing to lack of transport and other difficulties, was physically impossible at so short notice. But ultimately two Divisions were placed there. The vicinity of Winchester provided camps for two more. Dorsetshire a fifth. A sixth was placed near Didcot. A seventh and the Canadians on Salisbury Plain. But it was easy to foresee that tents must be replaced by huts in the winter.

This replacement was the care of the Director of Works at the War Office (General Scott-Moncrieff), acting under the orders of the Master-General of Ordnance nominally, but in reality under the direct supervision of Lord Kitchener. Even the Field-Marshal's driving power could not, however, achieve impossibilities, and as the winter drew on, it became evident that other shelter must

be found for the troops, pending the completion of the hutments.

Fortunately among the many provisions of that admirable—though much abused law—the Defence of the Realm Act, were powers to billet troops. Armed by these powers the Q.M.G. was able to direct that house accommodation was to be found by the civilian population for the troops training to fight for the nation's existence. It was indeed a novel experience, for the billeting, which made the Army so unpopular in the seventeenth century, was but a trifle compared, to take a typical instance, with the thrusting of a division of twenty thousand men at a few hours' notice into the city of Winchester and thus, then and there, doubling its inhabitants. But, thanks to the co-operation of the local authorities and the unbounded patriotism of that time, the housing of the great masses of partly-disciplined soldiery was carried out without difficulty and without serious complaint. The nation may well look back with satisfaction to the good conduct of its troops and to the self-sacrificing efforts made universally by the civilian population for their welfare and entertainment—material, social and spiritual.

Throughout this time of strain and stress at home the features particularly noticeable to the Staff of the big home commands were :

(i.) The rapidity with which the War Office acquired the strength and capacity needed to deal with the problems with which it was suddenly faced, and for which the pre-War policy of the Government had prohibited preparation; and

(ii.) The accessibility of the Military Chiefs of the War Office to those coming up from Command Staffs to seek assistance and advice, their quickness to give all possible aid in their power and their never failing sympathy with command difficulties.

It would be untrue and most unfair to the other great Military Departments, as well as to the Financial Staff at the War Office, to suggest that this sympathy and readiness to help were to be found only in the Quarter-

master-General's Department, but to a General Officer-in-charge of Administration like myself, who had to tackle all Administrative Departments and deal with administration as a whole, it seemed, and I still think the conception to be just, that the heaviest burden of all lay upon the Q.M.G., and that we, outsiders as it were from the country, had special cause for remembering gratefully the way in which access was always obtainable to Sir John Cowans and his Directors, and sympathy and aid always given, no matter how great the pressure of work on their shoulders. I for one can, at any rate, testify with a grateful heart that at no time in my six years' active service can I record feeling the same certainty of knowing that whatever one asked for would be granted, if it were possible and there were reasonable grounds for asking, and whatever one did, if there were just cause for such doing, would be approved, however much regulations had been overstepped or one's powers exceeded.

Nor was this confined to the home commands, though it was the more remarkable there, as the Field Service Regulations did give larger financial powers in the Field, while at home the existing Regulations contemplated as rigid compliance in war-time with the letter of the law as in peace.

Yet overseas it was a very real help to know that support was always forthcoming at home, and that assistance asked for would be given promptly, if due consideration of conflicting claims from other theatres of war permitted. Of more practical value, too, was the maintenance of personal touch with Cowans. The War Office rule that all official communications should be addressed to the Secretary of the Army Council is harmless, perhaps even convenient in peace-time; but in war-time it is disconcerting to the sender and on occasion injurious to the public service, when an answer to an important telegram shows that it has drifted into the wrong portion of the Whitehall Mansion and the reply has been drafted by an uncomprehending and unsympathetic subordinate. Sir William Robertson, when Chief of the Imperial General

Staff, wisely therefore ruled that all important communications affecting operations or policy should be addressed to him.

His lucid and prompt replies never failed to give the exact guidance needed. Sir John Cowans similarly permitted his representatives overseas, whenever necessity arose, to telegraph or write to him personally, and his immediate replies showed that the representations made had received at once his personal and full consideration.

The enormous volume and immense progress of Cowans's work during the War has been already briefly touched on, but will be only fully realised when it can be studied as a whole in the Official History.

I have tried in these notes to set out some rude outline of a portion of the work of Sir John Cowans in the Great War, as it appeared to me who had the privilege of being in a certain sense one of the agents and overseers, at first at home, in the strain and stress of the beginning of the Great War, and afterwards overseas. Of Gallipoli and Egypt I have written of what I saw with my own eyes. Of Mesopotamia the vision was more limited, but a month's visit, as Q.M.G. in India, gave special opportunities of realising how and by whom failure had been converted into victory. The magnitude, the complexity and the vast importance of the work of the Quartermaster-General's Department in modern war are not fully understood by the average regimental soldier and hardly at all appreciated by the civilian. Yet a close study of the greater operations of 1914-1918 indicates that to attain victory strategy and administration must march hand in hand in closest touch and fullest concord, one with another.

It is the business of the Administrative Staff of course to accept loyally the design of the strategist and to build up machinery in conformity with it; but it is, too, the business of the strategist to take the utmost care that his design allows full time for administrative preparation and does not exceed the administrative capacity available. It is not too much to say that weakness in design may be made good by completeness in preparation,

whereas incompleteness in the latter will often ship-wreck the ideally perfect plan.

Some amazing claims have from time to time been put forward on behalf of individuals—for the most part civilians—that this or that man won the Great War. The War was, in fact, won not by any individual, but by the united effort of the whole British Empire, and for this reason the highest honour is rightly paid to the "Unknown Soldier," who represents all who gave their lives for King and country. But history, if she be true to herself, will compile in due course a list of those who bore the heaviest burdens in the gigantic struggle and of those who pulled their weight with the greatest advantage to the Empire. In that list—high up in it—should appear, if justice is done, the name of Sir John Cowans, the officer who, throughout the War, bore the main burden of the supply and maintenance of the greatest armies ever placed in the Field, not only without any of the failures and shortcomings, which disfigured so many previous British campaigns, but with uniform success and uniform completeness. Till history proclaims just judgment, Cowans's memory will be cherished by all who served with or under him as a great administrative chief and a most loyal and sympathetic comrade.

EDWARD ALTHAM.

APPENDIX II.

RATION STRENGTH OF THE ARMY, JULY, 1914

—	Men.	Animals.
At Home	120,000	23,500
Abroad	44,000	4,000
Total	164,000	27,500

RATION STRENGTH, NOVEMBER 11, 1918

(Exclusive of Army in India and permanent garrisons overseas)

Theatre.	Men.	Animals.
France	2,360,400	404,000
Egypt	480,000	167,000[1]
Salonika	385,000	120,000
East Africa	111,731	1,499
Mesopotamia	413,406	88,145[2]
Italy	97,822	20,482
Home	1,514,993	94,644
Total	5,363,352	895,770

[1] Includes 32,000 camels and 10,000 donkeys.
[2] Includes 2,000 camels and 4, 700 bullocks.

APPENDIX III.

TOTAL MOTOR-VEHICLES IN USE ON NOVEMBER 11, 1918, IN ALL THEATRES OF OPERATIONS

	Motor lorries, tractors, etc.	Motor-cars and Motor-vans.	Motor-ambulances.	Motor-cycles.
Available on Peace Establishment of 1914 ..	807[1]	20	—	15
Balance provided on Mobilisation	334	193	—	116
France	31,770	7,694	3,532	14,464
Italy	1,363	516	238	765
Salonika	2,320	1,806	338	628
Egypt	2,062	1,255	585	1,486
Mesopotamia	1,297	3,840	430	1,233
East Africa	738	2,191	314	830
Malta and Gibraltar ..	82	22	83	16
India	137	34	50	135
Home companies ..	5,721	3,280	948	5,391
Home depots	11,169	2,495	527	9,917
Total, all theatres ..	56,659	23,133	7,045	34,865

[1] Eighty War Department property and 727 subsidised.

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